

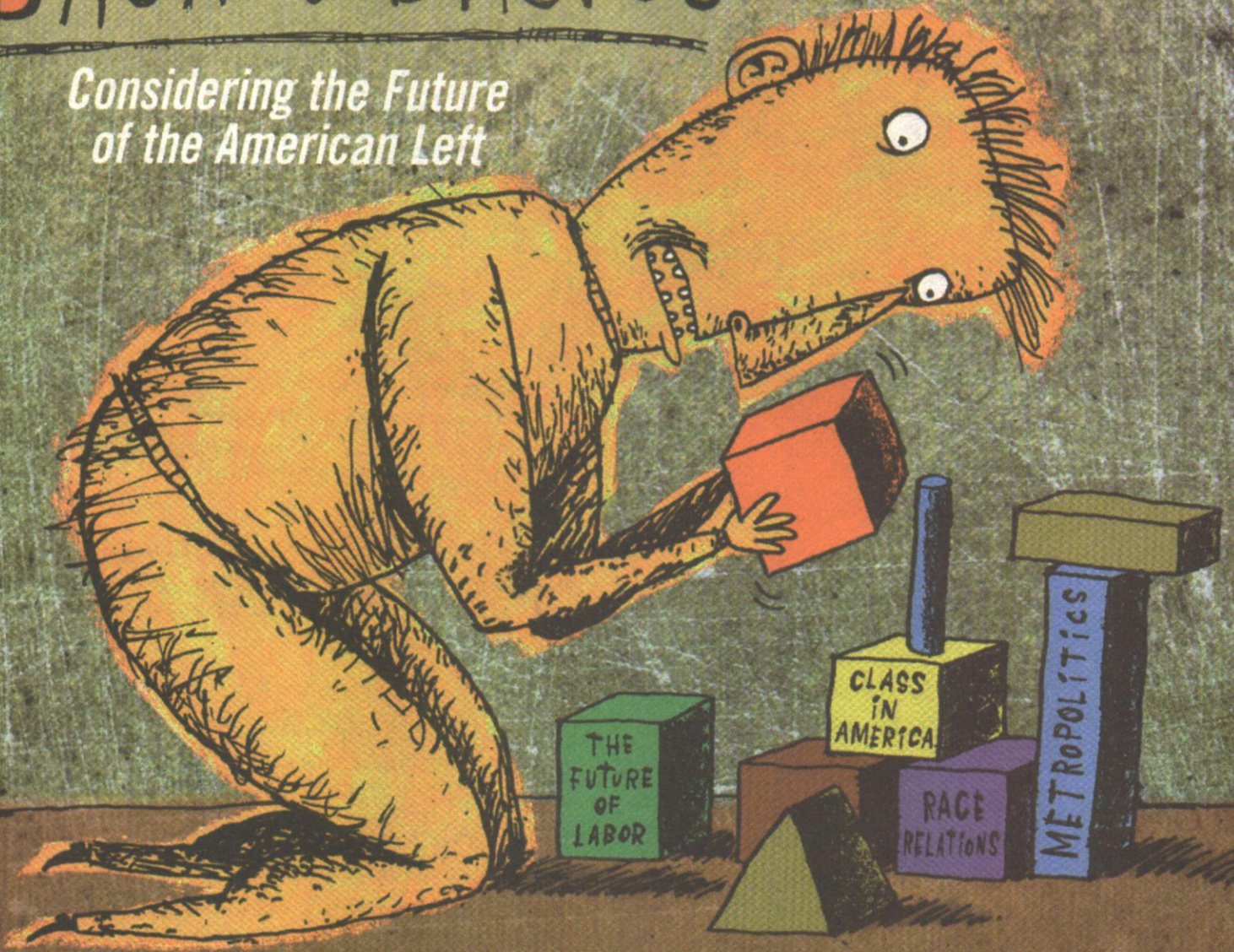
In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

October 18, 1998

BACK to BASICS

*Considering the Future
of the American Left*



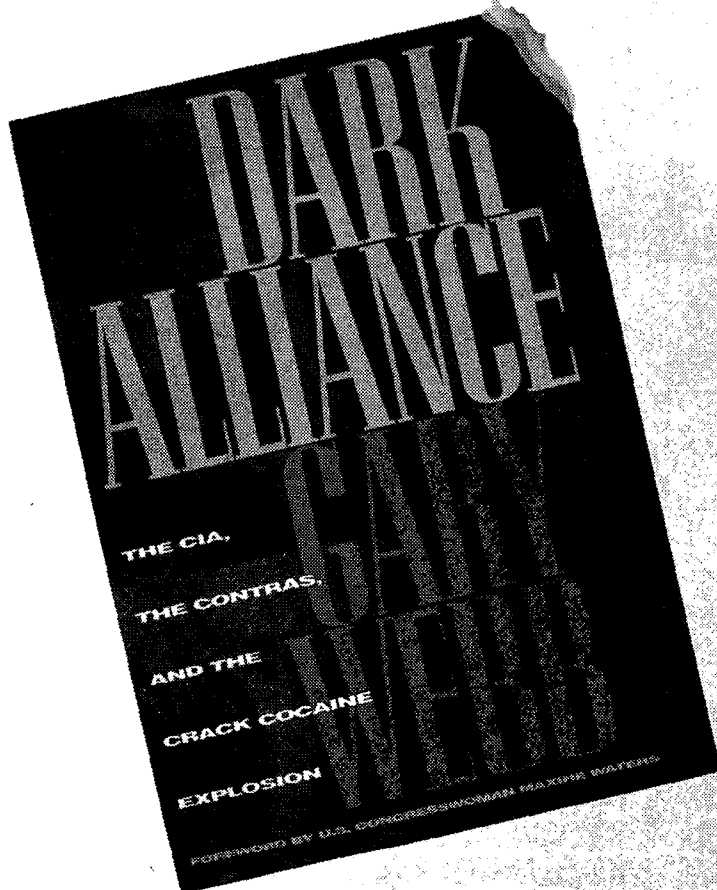
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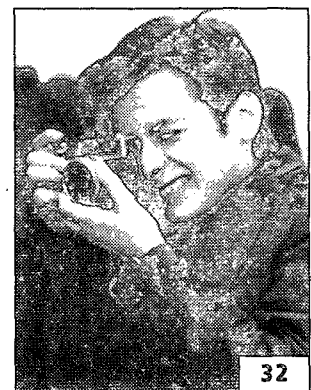
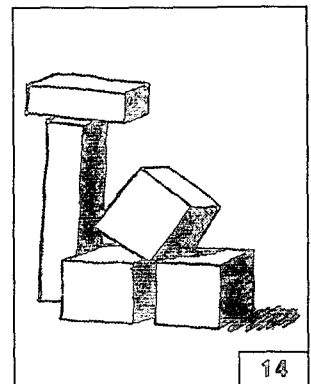
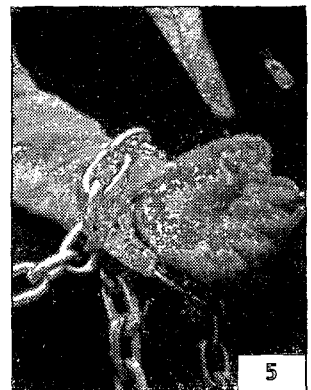
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Cover illustration by Maura Cluthe

VP for Sales, Third World Division

"Pressing Closer to Cuba" by James Weinstein (September 6) repeats the historical fallacy that Cuba's Stalinist dictator, Fidel Castro, was "forced" to get "entangled in the Cold War" and to accept a "Soviet-imposed political system."

The historical record, available to anyone with an open mind, is clear. Between 1958 and 1961, the Cuban *caudillo* willfully opted to become Nikita Khrushchev's roving vice president in charge of sales to the so-called "Third World." Castro invested Cuban blood in support of Soviet adventurism in places as diverse as Ethiopia, the Congo, Bolivia, Guatemala, Vietnam and Venezuela.

Many European leftists who spent time in Cuba in the '60s and '70s, such as France's Regis Debray, eventually gave up on the revolution, offended by Castro's personal arrogance and his style of arbitrary and impetuous decision making. Likewise, in 1998, Castro does not care a wit about Cuba's poor, nor the dignity of its people. He wants Yankee dollars.

David E. Blank
Louisville, Ky.

True Friends

I read with interest Pat Arnow's "A Road Closes: A Small Tragedy" (September 6). However, there is

one point I would like to make clear. I have been a member of the Road Company for the past 21 years and I speak for the company when I say we do not think the tributes made to the company by the Tennessee Arts Commission and the Johnson City Area Arts Council were "nonsense," as Arnow stated. These two organizations were always supportive and available whenever we needed them—for advice, information, and, of course, money. They supported us because they believed in what we were doing. No matter that it wasn't mainstream. No matter that it wasn't always brilliant. They supported us like true friends do.

Christine Murdoch
Johnson City, Tenn.

No Good Expectations

I suppose James Goodno's conclusion that the California state budget deal "brought little cheer for progressives" depends on one's expectations ("California's Budget Blues," September 6). By most accounts, California's final budget was the most progressive in several years—and far better than anyone expected.

The new Democratic legislative leadership of Sen. John Burton and Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, harnessing strong grass-roots pressure, forced Gov. Pete Wilson and his fellow Republicans to accept a deal that is progressive under any definition. It

includes the following: the first statewide welfare increase in nine years; the reinstatement of the renter's tax credit for the first time in six years; the reinstatement of food stamps for legal immigrants; increases in aid to the aged, blind and disabled; and \$325 million in school funding beyond that requested by Wilson. Considering that Wilson repeatedly has attacked immigrants, welfare recipients, tenants and public education, the ability of the Democratic leadership to make these groups key beneficiaries of the budget deal shows that it was Wilson, not the Democrats, who largely backed down.

Giving low-income people tangible benefits from the budget process is essential to building the broad movement for greater reform that we need. The 1998 budget laid the groundwork for significant gains under a newly elected Democratic governor next year.

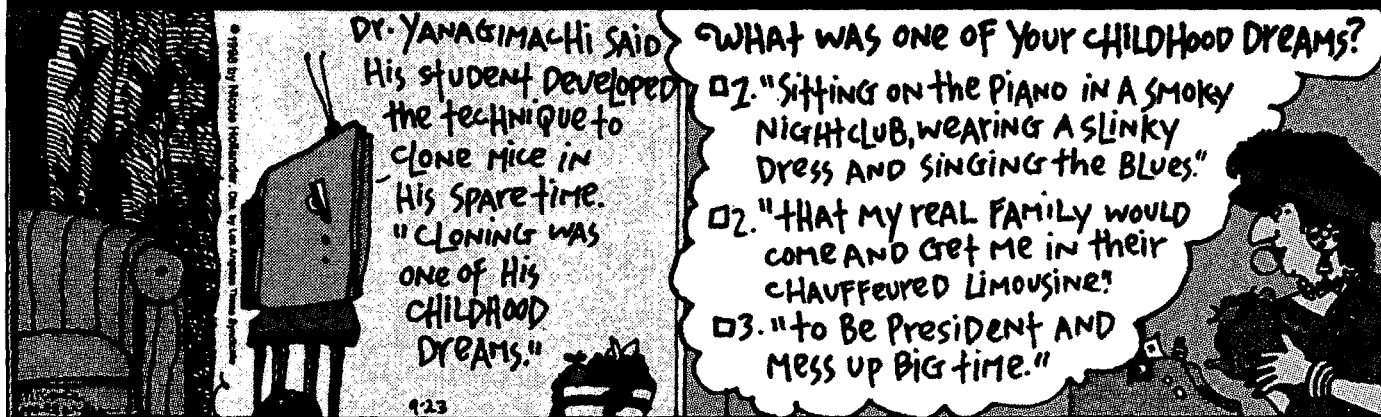
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SYLVIA

By Nicole Hollander



Let's Get Back to Basics

What if they held an election and nobody voted? It hasn't come to that yet, but it's getting close. In the first 16 states to hold primary elections this year, only 17 percent of those old enough to vote bothered to do so. Ten states had record low turnouts. In Texas, only 7.6 percent of the electorate cast ballots. In Nevada, where voters could select "none," many voters did just that. Seventeen of the 33 Nevada candidates for statewide office in the September 8 primary lost to "none." In the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor, "none" came in second with 24 percent of the vote in a four-way race.

All of this happened before Kenneth Starr released his report. A week later, on September 15, eight other states and the District of Columbia held primary elections. The Monica Lewinsky scandal played no discernible role in the outcomes, but the number of voters continued to decline. Politicians and pundits attribute this latest drop in political interest to the White House sex scandal. They are correct in this sense: Clinton's incessant use of the English language to obscure rather than reveal the truth resonates with voters disgusted at politicians who talk about serving the people's interests during election season—and then legislate in the corporations' interest once elected.

As the electorate has narrowed, so, too, have the differences between Democratic and Republican officeholders. As a result, an increasing majority of those eligible to vote find that no one represents them. This, in turn, has created a crisis, a public estrangement from civic life, that seriously threatens our democracy. Yet few of our present political leaders voice concern about this situation. Preoccupied with their own re-elections, they are slaves to the polls and focus groups that are used to snare that ever-shrinking core of eligible voters who now comprise the electorate.

All of this is both a cause and a result of the decline of the left in the United States. With the central importance of television and the media in the election process, money has become all-important to individuals running for office. And, as political parties give way to media sound bites, it becomes increasingly difficult to win elections through sustained popular mobilization. The result, of course, is that monied interests dominate our political life as never before, while fewer and fewer people have any meaningful incentive to vote.

The left's own disorientation also has contributed to this process. Its failure to challenge the ideology of corporate America, its abandonment of class as the under-

lying substance of our public life and its retreat into a cultural politics that isolates it from natural allies, have all contributed to a disorientation that threatens to marginalize us permanently.

So where do we go from here? Nobody, including us, knows. But we do know that it's time to think about these issues seriously. Otherwise we should just give up on politics and the hope of fulfilling our nation's promise of genuine democracy.

That's why we decided to organize a conference on the future of the American left. It's called "Back to Basics" and it will be held in Chicago from October 9 to 11. The purpose of the conference is to explore how we can increase our presence in the mainstream of American political and intellectual life. We hope to start by examining the underlying principles of the left and to stimulate thought about how these

The purpose of the conference is to explore how we can increase our presence in the mainstream of American political and intellectual life.

principles can be translated into legislative goals and programs that resonate with the concerns and desires of most Americans.

To do so, we first must develop a distinct public identity. And we must learn how to participate in politics in a way that the vast majority of the American people understand.

For far too long the face of American politics has been dominated by questions of individual character and issues of private behavior, while its substance has been the protection and enhancement of corporate power. In a democracy, however, the appropriate role of government is not to regulate private behavior, but to provide for the common welfare and to allow the majority to determine public policy for the common good.

For more than 200 years, Americans have struggled for a system in which it is possible for all to participate. Of course, our current national leaders have no interest in seeing such potential realized. Indeed, they are the instruments of the degradation of the democratic ideal.

The left, if it is to have any historical significance, must provide nothing less than the means for rescuing our democracy. "Back to Basics" is one small step toward that goal.—J.W.

Tackling Unocal's Corporate Crimes

By James B. Goodno

A coalition of activists and lawyers has asked California Attorney General Dan Lungren to initiate proceedings to revoke the charter of the Union Oil Company of California (Unocal), one of the world's largest energy resource firms. The coalition charged the company with a plethora of environmental, labor and human rights violations.

Kathy Spillar, national coordinator of the Feminist Majority Foundation, says California firms have a responsibility to follow the standards set by the state wherever they do business. "If you are going to enjoy the benefits of being a California corporation, of being a U.S. corporation, you have to abide by a set of rules that the American people have established."

Unocal, the coalition claims, has frequently violated environmental and occupational safety and health laws, released toxins at 82 Superfund sites and contributed to human rights violations in Burma. In addition, complainants have questioned the legality of some of Unocal's dealings with the Taliban, the extremist militia that controls most of Afghanistan.

Drawing attention to what Robert Benson, professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and principal author of the complaint, describes as the "failure of the regulatory state," the coalition invoked a little-used course of action: California, like other states, retains the right to revoke corporate charters it has issued when it believes a company has violated the law.

"Rather than fight a losing battle against harms one by one," he says,

"the California attorney general has legal authority to ask a court to dissolve a company by revoking its corporate charter."

Unocal spokesman Barry Lane describes the action as "ludicrous." "This is about [Burma], the rest is window dressing," he says.

"They failed to get us out through the

ness and the difficulties activists face in challenging corporate power through conventional political and legal means. Members of the coalition, however, remain committed to a variety of tactics, including shareholder resolutions, boycotts, lobbying and litigation, and they bring a broad range of priorities to the table, notably concerns about the environment, democracy and women's rights.

The Feminist Majority Foundation, for example, signed the complaint because of Unocal's contacts with the Taliban in Afghanistan, through which a Unocal-led consortium hopes to build a pipeline. The Taliban has effectively imprisoned women and girls in their

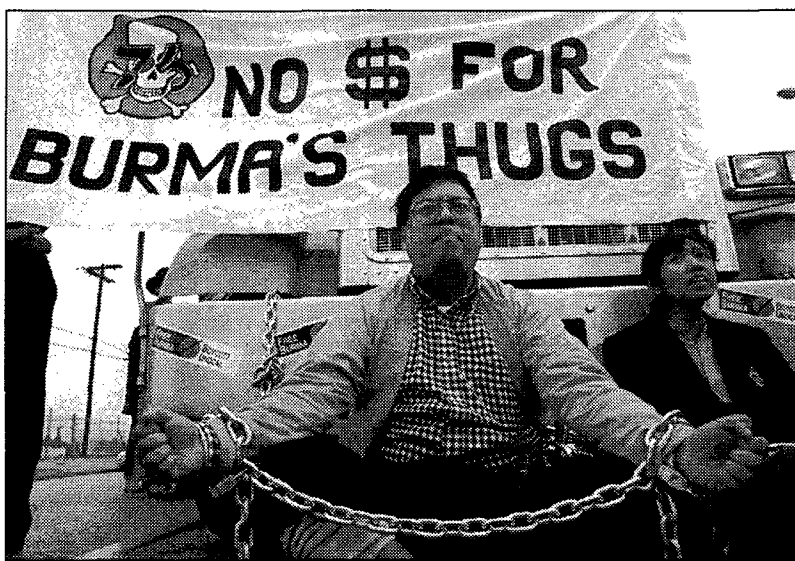
homes, preventing a them from working outside the house or attending school, and allowing husbands and fathers to determine when they may come and go.

Many complainants and other Unocal critics view the company's behavior in the United States and other countries as linked. "Unocal thinks it is immune to morality and public opinion," says Joe Drexler, of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW). OCAW, which is not a party to the complaint, once

represented roughly 1,500 Unocal employees. That number declined to 200 as Unocal sold its refinery and marketing operations. In the process, almost 900 Unocal employees lost their jobs. "This is a company that basically sold its U.S. operations to finance activities in places like Burma," Drexler says.

Proponents of the complaint hope activists elsewhere in the country will follow suit. The National Lawyers Guild plans to conduct workshops in various cities to encourage similar actions. "We hope lots of people will steal this idea and run with it," Benson says. ■

James B. Goodno is the editor of *The Urban Ecologist* and lives in Berkeley, Calif.



Unocal has few friends among Burma's refugees.

democratic process," he adds, citing shareholder resolutions, consumer boycotts, punitive sanctions and lawsuits, "now they're asking the attorney general to overturn these decisions by fiat."

To an extent, Lane is right: Activists are broadly opposed to Unocal's Burma operations. In conjunction with Thai and French firms, Unocal is developing an offshore natural gas field and an overland pipeline in Burma. Critics charge the company with complicity with the Burmese dictatorship in the use of forced labor, the suppression of independent trade unions and the destruction of the rainforest.

It is also true that the action against Unocal reflects a broader concern about the way many large corporations do busi-

Chemical Warfare Comes to the Ozarks

By Peter Downs

The Mark Twain National Forest in southern Missouri's Ozark Mountains is known for its crystal clear streams, natural springs, ancient caves and fragile forest glades. Soon it will have another claim to fame: the home to one of only two nerve gas production facilities in the world authorized by the International Chemical Weapons Convention.

Last June, the U.S. Army broke ground at Fort Leonard Wood, the future home of the Army's Chemical School. Nestled around three sides of the fort is the national forest, where the Army will use 96,000 acres for training exercises. Soldiers and equipment will crisscross the forest floor and drive through streams while surrounded by a chemical fog of tiny metallic flakes designed to hide them from enemy eyes and electronic devices.

In 1995, as the Defense Department faced spending cuts, the Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) Commission slotted for closure Fort Leonard Wood, which houses an artillery school and a basic training camp, and Fort Mead McClellan in Alabama, the location of the Army Chemical School. The BRAC Commission later decided one of the two bases would remain open to absorb the duties of the other. Local business leaders and state politicians—worried about the negative effects Fort Leonard Wood's closing would have on the local economy—rallied to keep the base alive. Later that year, the BRAC Commission ordered the Army Chemical School to relocate from Fort Mead McClellan to Fort Leonard Wood. For their part, the Missouri Air Conservation Commission and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources exempted Fort Leonard Wood from pollution regulations in June 1996, allowing the Army to exceed state opacity (or smoke density) standards during training.

The U.S. Army Chemical School trains soldiers in "force protection,"

which Hershel Chapman, media chief at the Fort Mead McClellan, says consists of hiding troops, and detecting and combating chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. The school also practices "live agent training," which entails the use of actual radioactive isotopes, microorganisms, nerve gas and mustard gas in military exercises. The rationale for live agent training is that soldiers become more skilled at protecting themselves if they are exposed to real health dangers.

At the new Fort Leonard Wood school, the Army will manufacture two types of nerve gas, sarin and VX. In a report on chemical weapons, Ron Purver, strategic analyst with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, writes, "The amount of VX that one can

place on the head of a pin is sufficient to produce death in a human being."

Another environmental concern involves oil fog, the smoke emitted to hide troop movements during live agent chemical weapons training. Oil fog contains high levels of furan, a chemical that harms the immune, nervous and reproductive systems. According to Paul Connett, a chemist and hazardous waste specialist for the environmental group Work on Waste, furan is closely related to dioxin and similarly toxic. The concentration of furans released by Army smoke generators is one million times greater than the level the World Health Organization has set as safe for humans.

Earlier this year, the Army filed an environmental impact statement asserting that none of the activities at the chemical school would adversely affect the environment. The report also explained that little is known about the long-term health or environmental effects of most of the chemicals used in training. Robert Schreiber, an environ-

Continued on page 6

Terry LaBan



Appall-o-Meter

The In These Times Index of Indecencies

By David Futrelle

White Humor (9.5)

What better way to celebrate Labor Day than to dress in blackface and stage a comedic re-enactment of a brutal racially motivated slaying? In this year's Labor Day Mardi Gras Parade, sponsored by the village of Broad Channel's volunteer fire department, a group of men from the mostly white neighborhood in Queens, N.Y., covered themselves in blackface makeup and danced in the back of a pickup truck while drinking from 40-oz. bottles. "One member of the group briefly hung from the moving truck's tailgate in an apparent mockery of the dragging death of a black man in Texas earlier this year," *Newsday* noted.

After the incident came to media attention and was denounced by everyone from New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to Al Sharpton, several of the blackface actors came forward at a news conference to offer an explanation. "The men said they had entered floats in Broad Channel's Labor Day Mardi Gras parade for the last nine years," *Newsday* reported. "Many of the floats had racial themes and were well received."

One of the men went so far as to apologize—sort of—for this year's not-so-well received entry. "We are all appalled that anyone was offended," 28-year-old Kenneth Miller told the

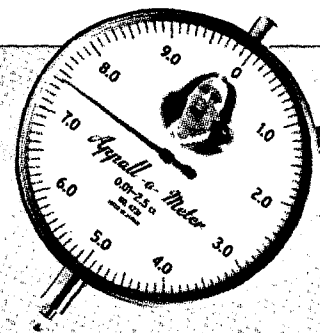
press. "We meant for it to be funny as if it was on *Saturday Night Live*."

When Animals Attack: Live (5.3)

In his own way, Chinese zoologist Liu Xinchun has helped to revive the population of the endangered Siberian tiger: Starting 12 years ago



with a brood of eight bedraggled tigers rescued from miserable Chinese zoos, he has managed to fill the Siberian Tiger Park in Harbin with a population of 110 big cats. Like many institutions in China, the Siberian Tiger Park is short on funds. So Liu has come up with an ingenious way to fill the tigers' bellies and the park's coffers: He charges visitors to watch his tigers kill and eat their prey—chickens, cows, whatever the audience desires. The price for



admission depends on what kind of animal you want to see: \$120 for a pig, only \$12 for a rabbit. The biggest problem the cats have now, a recent report in the *Wall Street Journal* suggests, is choking to death on too much food. The *Journal* notes, "Tourists occasionally complain that the sated tigers"—already stuffed with chickens and cows and who knows what else—"ignore the frightened animals released for them to kill."

Zhirinovsky Family Values (6.7)

Like everyone else in the world, noted Russian xenophobe Vladimir Zhirinovsky has an opinion on the Monica Lewinsky matter. He thinks Bill Clinton should be a man and marry the girl. "We, as individuals with high moral character, would prefer not to meet a person who still can't sort out his relationship with his secretary," Zhirinovsky recently told the Russian parliament. "In such situations, one divorces the old wife and marries the secretary to close the shameful page." As Reuters points out, Zhirinovsky previously has displayed his moral character by "beating a female deputy on the floor of parliament" and appearing in a film "in which he cavorts with naked women."

Continued from page 5

mental engineer in St. Louis who analyzed the impact statement for the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, says the report mistakenly concludes that if a chemical is not immediately toxic, then it is safe.

The Army also has faced an expensive cleanup at Fort Mead McClellan because of widespread contamination by hazardous chemicals. In order to skirt the high cost of decommissioning and decontaminating McClellan, the Army has turned it over to the Justice Department for further use.

Roger Pryor, executive director of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, says the Army has turned over contaminated nuclear facilities to different government organizations in the past. Many contaminated sites are "grandfathered" under law, meaning no one has to clean them up if they keep operating.

The Army still is not satisfied with the oil fog restrictions in its permit. In the environmental impact statement, the Army contends that the chemical school must burn 84,500 gallons of fuel oil per year—33 percent more than the permit

allows—to train soldiers adequately. But, if necessary, the chemical school would accept the permit's current restrictions.

The question is, for how long? Kay Drey of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment says if the school isn't closed, the Army will keep coming back to the state to raise its pollution limits. Meanwhile, the disruption and destruction of the Mark Twain National Forest will get worse. ■

Peter Downs is a freelance writer based in St. Louis.

Return of the *Braceros*

By Ron Bigler

Across the country, millions of formerly undocumented workers are leading lives as U.S. citizens and workers, thanks to an immigration amnesty program enacted by Congress in 1986. For many—especially exploited farm workers—the 1986 amnesty provided an opportunity to join unions and organize for better living and working conditions. Now, a bill in Congress that would make it easier for farmers and growers to legally hire temporary foreign labor is threatening the jobs and economic security of these new immigrants.

On July 23, the Senate added an amendment to a \$33 billion appropriations bill that would grant thousands of temporary visas to foreign workers seeking jobs on farms in the United States. This could allow employers to replace their entire labor force with temporary, non-resident workers who lack the rights or protections of resident workers.

Sponsored by Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), the guest worker amendment would aid American growers and farmers who complain that they cannot find enough cheap labor to harvest their crops. The amendment, which provoked no public hearing and only minimal debate in Congress, was approved by 68 to 31, with only Democrats voting against it. Congress is expected to vote on the appropriations bill before the end of the legislative session. Opponents are hoping President Clinton will veto the spending bill if it passes Congress with the amendment.

The UFW, the AFL-CIO, the Farmworker Justice Fund, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and other farm worker advocates say the guest worker amendment will eliminate existing protections for migrant farm workers, depress wages, fail to provide

adequate housing and expose workers to unsafe working conditions. "The growers and farmers in Washington state, Oregon, California and elsewhere want to bring back a legalized form of slavery in the United States," says Miguel Juarez, an organizer with the UFW in Washington. "They don't want to pay decent wages and give jobs to the work-



Will child labor return to the fields?

LONNY SHAVELSON/IMPACT VISUALS

ers who are already living here; they just want temporary workers to come here and leave."

While the guest worker amendment does allow some guest workers to apply for permanent visas, that provision is coming under fire by House Republicans who oppose any new measures that would permit legal immigration. The amendment's backers, led by the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Council of Agricultural Employees, cite studies showing that an increasing number of migrants have been searching for work in urban areas where work is more

steady and the pay is sometimes better. This, they say, is evidence of an agricultural labor shortage.

Opponents, however, point to a General Accounting Office investigation published last December, which concluded that a severe labor shortage in the agricultural sector is "unlikely to occur in the near future." They say that if farmers and growers want to attract more local workers, they should start by offering better wages and working conditions and ending the practice of hiring undocumented workers through labor contractors.

Essentially, the proposed guest worker program is a new version of the *bracero* program instituted by the U.S. government in 1942 due to wartime labor shortages. Most *braceros* (Spanish for "strong arms") traveled to border towns where they signed temporary labor contracts, and then went off to work in the fields, helping the United States develop the world's most productive agricultural economy.

Under the *bracero* program, the United States granted 4.6 million temporary work permits. The program was abolished in 1964 after reports of scandalous working and living conditions. Squalid, overcrowded housing, a lack of running water or bathrooms, exposure to pesticides and 14-hour workdays were just some of the realities brought to the attention of the American public.

When Congress votes on the guest worker bill this fall, *braceros* may well return. "Here in Washington we don't need more foreign workers," says Juarez. "We get 10 to 50 people who are legal workers applying each time a new job is announced. Give them the jobs first." ■

Ron Bigler is a freelance writer living in Mexico.

The White House Players Club

By Julianne Malveaux

The *Players Club* was a recent B-movie about young women who strip to earn money for college tuition, fancy cars and a better way of life. It wasn't a very good movie, and I wouldn't have even been watching it had not a friend's daughter been featured in its closing moments. It's a long bridge from the gritty L.A. *Players Club* to the White House, but there is a disturbing line from the movie that resonates: "Use what you got to get what you want."

In *The Players Club*, women used their bodies for money. The Clinton-Lewinsky affair is about two folks who did the same kind of brokering. President Clinton used his appeal (which is at least partly related to power) to get sex from a young woman, while Monica Lewinsky used her youthful guile to access the Oval Office and the world's most powerful man. The president's affair with a White House intern is morally unacceptable, but only potentially impeachable because witch-hunting Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr squandered \$40 million on Whitewater, Travelgate and Filegate before constructing traps involving sex and its inevitable lies. While partisan Republicans say the Starr report is "not just

an imbalance of power. Those who understand the inequality of power between men and women have consistently been concerned with the inherent possibility for coercion in Clinton-Lewinsky type relationships. They have always disagreed with those who say that women have the right to choose, even if it means choosing dangerous, exploitative relationships with older, often predatory, married men. In some ways, the Clinton-Lewinsky affair has caused women on the left and the right to flip their script. On the left, though the "first feminist" is now the "first fuckup," we are inclined to give him a break because of the Starr inquiry's partisanship and invasion of privacy. On the right, suddenly there are women who, indifferent to Anita Hill's allegations against Clarence Thomas, now say they would punish even consensual behavior because of its moral implications.

Partisanship and power are forcing feminists into a strange kind of shilly-shallying. Those of us who support this president should be able to do so while, at the same time, raising key questions about gender and power. Those who oppose him should make the terms of their opposition clear. Women are no different than men if we take this teachable moment and turn it into just another scorecard in the power game. The rules of that power game are: Go along to get along, don't ring the bell, don't rock the boat, don't call anybody out and "use what you got to get what you want." The problem is, as a sage young woman put it in the closing moments of *The Players Club*, "You can't want much if that is all you got." What did

Feminists who support this president should be able to do so while, at the same time, raising key questions about gender and power.

about sex," it mentions sex more than 500 times, lying a couple hundred times, a cigar about 40 times and Whitewater only twice. It is impossible for this progressive Democratic feminist to argue in support of President Clinton's behavior, but it is equally impossible to argue that Starr's report is about anything but political entrapment.

Having said all that, where does that leave women in the workplace? Monica Lewinsky is no different from millions of subordinate women who have had to "use what they got to get what they want." Some have done it consensually and eagerly, others haltingly and under duress. In the latter case, we call it sexual harassment and prosecute bosses who coerce sex from their workers. Consensual sex in the workplace, though, is not a victimless event. It boils up, spills over and poisons workplace interactions. That's why the law and the public frown on authority figures who use their power to facilitate relationships with subordinates.

These are not always exploitative relationships, but they have an exploitative appearance because of the

Lewinsky want? And what about Clinton? Have we truly, "come a long way baby," when "use what you got to get what you want" is still one of the rules of the game?

What does this mean for the future of feminism? It means that feminists, like others, must grapple with the ways that personal behavior can be used as a political weapon. It means that feminists, like me, who have asked that the president be "forgiven," must ask whether we are willing or able to forgive others for their peccadilloes. It means that as we decide to separate the sin from the sinner, the adulterer from the policy advocate, we must ask what is lost when we make that separation. Is our president so tarnished that he is useless to feminists? Are we a nation of players, using "what we got to get what we want"? And where does that leave us—feminists, progressives, Americans—when the dust clears? ■

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based syndicated columnist and economist.

The Clinton Coup Advances

By Robert Parry

Without a doubt, President Clinton brought on much of his current trouble himself. But Clinton's impending impeachment is not just a personal predicament or a political dilemma for the Democrats. It could mark a crossroads for American democracy.

We are witnessing a kind of postmodern political coup against the president, over charges that are essentially trivial: a pathetic attempt to conceal a tawdry extramarital affair. Certainly, the offense pales in seriousness when compared to the constitutional violations committed by Richard Nixon in Watergate and by Ronald Reagan and George Bush in the Iran-contra and related scandals. At the core of Watergate was a corrupt scheme by Nixon to sabotage the democratic process with illegal break-ins and dirty tricks. At the center of Iran-contra was a clandestine strategy to violate a host of U.S. laws, including arms sales to terrorists and collaboration with narcotics traffickers. Both sets of crimes were surrounded by elaborate obstructions of justice involving senior government officials.

But contrasting the Republican scandals with the Lewinsky matter may miss the point. The Clinton impeachment is essentially an outgrowth of those two scandals, rather than a distinct event that can be compared to them. The Clinton crisis is the culmination of a quarter-century campaign by the American right—started after the Watergate catastrophe—to build a huge political attack machine that includes a vast media echo chamber, well-financed think tanks and smart “opposition research” professionals.

With Clinton's election in 1992, that machine simply switched from playing an aggressive defense to an even more aggressive offense. The conservatives promoted one Clinton scandal after another.

Like any putsch, however, the Clinton coup requires the placement of operatives in strategic positions. That movement of forces actually began as a defensive move in early 1992 when President Bush was fretting about the continuing Iran-contra investigation. At that point, Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist removed Judge George MacKinnon, a moderate Republican, as head of the three-judge panel that appoints and oversees special prosecutors. Rehnquist put in fellow conservative Republican, Judge David Sentelle, a protégé of Sen. Jesse Helms.

In August 1994, Sentelle's panel fired moderate Republican Robert Fiske, who had been investigating Whitewater, and hired Kenneth Starr, Bush's solicitor general and a conservative operative who then was working on a friend-of-the-court brief in the Paula Jones lawsuit. Starr was off on his four-year campaign to examine virtually every aspect of Clinton's life, both public

and private, in a search for some impeachable offense.

By late 1997, and some \$40 million later, Starr had no case to make against Clinton on the official scandals—Filegate and Travelgate—nor on Clinton's private business affairs—Whitewater. But Starr was spared the shame of returning empty-handed. Christian right activists, who were funding the Paula Jones sex harassment case, got an anonymous tip that a chatty young woman was blabbing about a sexual relationship with Clinton. Her name was Monica Lewinsky. Thanks to Lewinsky's friend Linda Tripp, the Jones' lawyers knew many details by the time they deposed Clinton on January 17, 1998. Clinton clumsily tried to finesse their questions. The perjury trap sprang shut.

The next week, it was disclosed that Starr had expanded his investigation to cover the Lewinsky matter. Clinton continued to stonewall for seven months, before finally admitting that he did have an “inappropriate” relationship with Lewinsky. Starr promptly sent Congress a lengthy narrative on that relationship, along with an 11-count referral recommending Clinton's impeachment.

The right's success has put the nation on the verge of an era that only Orwell and Kafka could have envisioned.

When Starr's steamy narrative was released September 11 on the Internet, Clinton was reduced to a laughing-stock around the world. Still, opinion polls showed that most Americans did not think Clinton's shabby behavior measured up to an impeachable offense.

In Washington, however, only the Congressional Black Caucus rallied to the president's side. Many other Democrats apparently felt that they might save themselves by throwing the president over the side. And Democratic leaders seem not to comprehend what the future might hold if the Clinton coup succeeds. Judge Sentelle soon could be appointing a new special prosecutor to look into Democratic fund-raising.

Regardless of Clinton's misdeeds, the right's success in ruining a president has put the nation on the verge of an era that only Orwell and Kafka could have envisioned. An ominous message rumbles from this impending Clinton impeachment: If even a president of the United States can be run out of Washington over personal foibles, what other politician, journalist or citizen will dare stand up to this conservative machine? ■

Robert Parry has covered Washington for two decades. He is editor of iF Magazine, a bi-monthly investigative publication.

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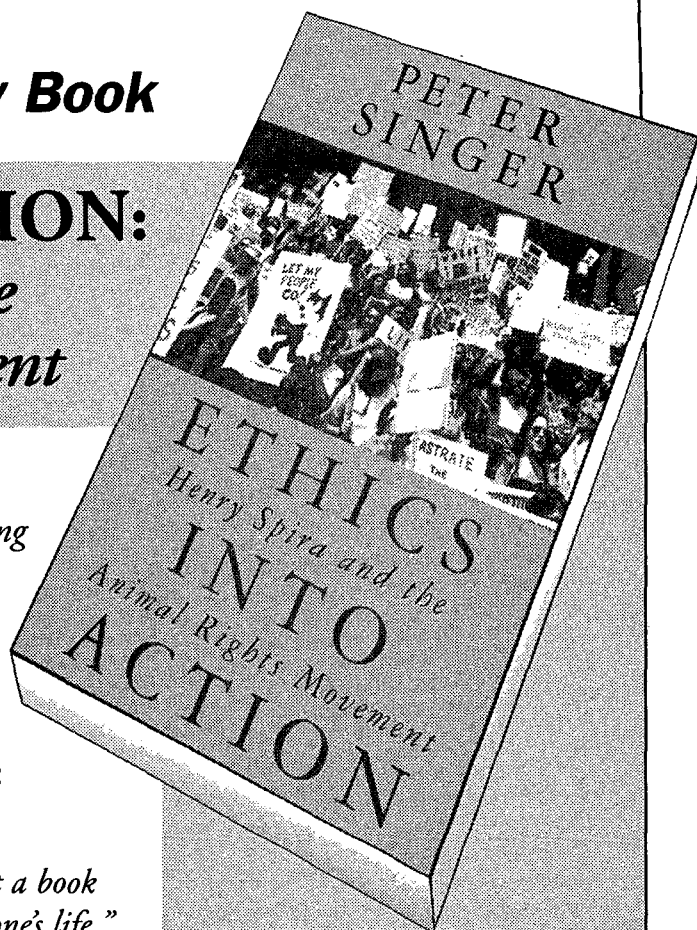
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Peter Singer is the author of 20 books on ethics and philosophy, including *Practical Ethics* and the best-selling *Animal Liberation*, which launched the modern animal rights movement. He is also the author of the major entry on ethics in the current *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

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ALL FALL DOWN

THE NEOLIBERALS' ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

By G. PASCAL ZACHARY

BERKELEY, CALIF.

When even Alan Greenspan, the high priest of free markets, gets the willies, you know the crisis in global capitalism is serious. His vacation last month turned into such a workathon, Greenspan joked in a recent speech here, that he started playing tennis "with a racket in my left hand and a cell phone in my right. It really stunned my opponents."

It stunned him too. Until a few weeks ago, the Federal Reserve chairman thought the crisis—the combination of mounting debt, collapsing currencies and weakening demand in developing countries—would have a salutary effect on the world system by spurring further measures to open up the economies of Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America to foreign capital, to restructure bloated national industries and to end the practice of "crony capitalism," whereby the business elite receive favorable government treatment. This view was essentially the same recipe offered by the U.S. Treasury and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the collapse of the Thai baht in July 1997 set the crisis in motion.

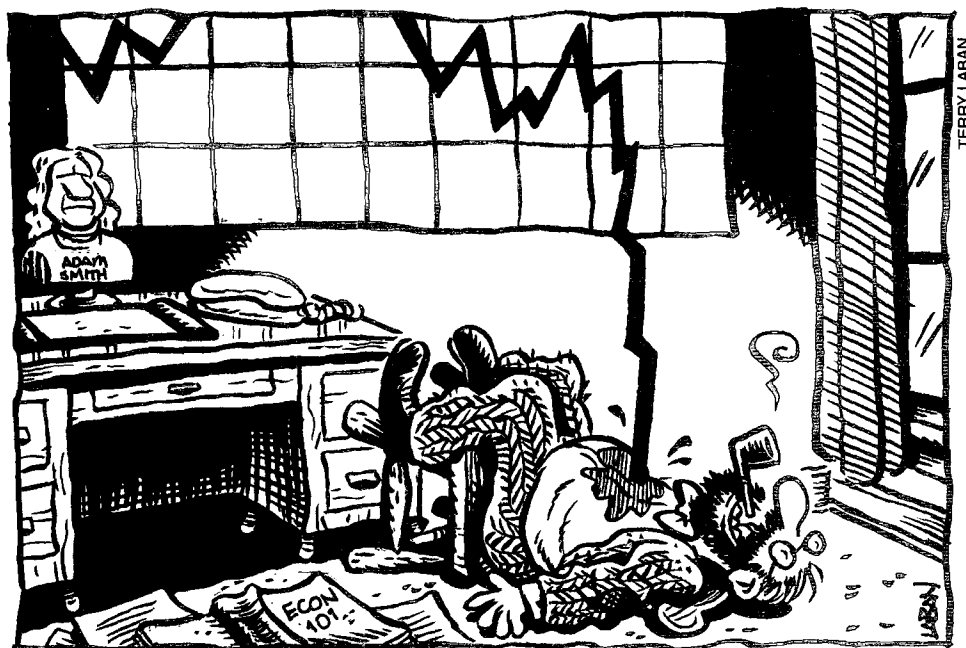
Over the past year, a series of setbacks have undermined the twin pillars of the neoliberal economic formula: that lifting government barriers on international trade and financial flows was the surest path toward worldwide prosperity. In the '90s, Greenspan and others in the international elite have brooked no arguments over their formula. Yet a long list of countries followed the IMF's advice, only to find their economies wrecked as fast-moving foreign capital first swamped their countries and then unexpectedly withdrew.

A humiliated IMF failed to halt the attacks on Russia's ruble, which prompted Russia to default on its debts in August. About the same time, China spent billions of dollars propping up the battered Hong Kong stock market. In early September, Malaysia, a famous friend to foreign investors,

banned overseas trading of its currency, the ringgit. Share prices then collapsed in Latin America; on September 10, Brazil's equities lost 15 percent of their value. U.S. stock prices also fell sharply, almost erasing a year's gains.

The situation remains volatile and uncertain. But clearly the summer of 1998 will go down in history as a watershed. The events of August and September alone amount to the biggest repudiation this decade of the neoliberal orthodoxy. "Washington's dream of a quick move to global financial liberalization is in ruins," says Harvard University economist Jeffrey Sachs.

In the face of these setbacks, some of the staunchest free-market cheerleaders ran for cover. Observing the meltdown, the *Wall Street Journal* declared that the free-market orthodoxy faced its "most serious challenge since the end of the Cold War." So deep was the soul-searching within the orthodoxy that some adherents are even starting to sound like progressives, parroting radical economists whom they had dismissed for years. Even Sachs, the architect of Russia's disastrous "shock therapy" shift to neoliberalism in the early '90s, wrote in the September 12 issue of *The Economist*, "The collapse of the emerging markets and its ricochet effect on advanced economies may not be the end of the globalization. But it is certainly the end of an era."



A new era may well be dawning, one in which unbridled capitalism faces a countervailing force around the world. What this alternative will be isn't clear, says Nancy Folbre, a radical economist at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, "but necessity is the mother of invention. There will have to be an alternative."

Today, economic ideas deemed irresponsible just weeks ago are suddenly in fashion. Currency controls, anathema to the IMF, are gaining favor, partly because the record shows that they insulate a country from market shocks and often don't hinder growth. Meanwhile, the ideal of economic self-sufficiency, derided by experts who prefer that nations discover a "comparative advantage," is no longer automatically dismissed as a path to stagnation but rather seen as a reasonable response to the vagaries of international financial flows. Finally, the crisis has exposed inflation-fighting as a hollow exercise—and highlighted the danger of deflation. While inflation hurts the poor unduly by raising living costs, deflation hurts the rich, who have more to lose when asset values fall. Now even Greenspan, the nation's foremost foe of price increases, thinks deflation presents an equal risk.

To be sure, the setbacks for the neoliberal orthodoxy must be tempered by a realization that its triumph was always overblown. While the end of the Cold War opened the entire world to capitalist expansion for the first time, the world's two most populous nations, India and China, never fully accepted the orthodoxy. China, while welcoming foreign investment and turning itself into an export powerhouse, always kept a tight leash on its currency, banning convertibility and fixing its exchange rate. India, meanwhile, took

A LONG LIST OF COUNTRIES FOLLOWED THE IMF'S ADVICE, ONLY TO FIND THEIR ECONOMIES WRECKED.

halting steps to open up its economy to foreigners in the early '90s but more recently resumed its decades-old suspicion of multinationals. Like China, it has avoided the calamities visited upon those Asian countries that adopted IMF "cures."

Meanwhile, in Russia, a pathological form of privatization took place. The pillaging of state assets by a tiny elite bears little resemblance to the beneficial play of market forces envisioned by the IMF. While Russia's economic collapse means worsening poverty for tens of millions of people in the former Soviet Union, their fate seems sadly inevitable. In retrospect, the ex-Soviets would have been better served by a gradual shift away from a state-run economy. What privatization zealots failed to realize is that a nation can't actually follow the capitalist road "until it has a functioning public administration," says Stephen S. Cohen, co-director of the University of California, Berkeley's Roundtable on the International Economy.

Six years ago, Cohen wrote a prescient article in which he described privatization as "the tunnel at the end of the light." Much to the chagrin of the neoliberals, market failure is now

fueling a nationalist backlash in Russia. Yet while the Western media roots for the survival of Yeltsin's forces in Russia, it is the ex-Communists in the Duma who seem to present a more sensible response to the crisis. Rather than adopt the dollar as its legal tender or go deeper into hock to the IMF, nationalists want to turn inward. They argue that Russia may recover faster by re-nationalizing industries rather than setting itself up for exploitation as a supplier of raw materials to the West.

The turmoil in Russia suggests that the failure of the free-market orthodoxy carries a steep price in human suffering. Despite continued predictions of the Dow index reaching 10,000 by next year and a "long boom" in the world economy because of technological innovation, the bears have a stronger case than at any time this decade. Growth in corporate profits is slowing. Global prices are falling on key commodities and even manufactured goods. The slump in oil prices, brought on by a glut in supply, has wreaked havoc and has contributed in no small part to Russia's crisis and Mexico's slide. All over the world, too many sellers are chasing too few buyers. And now that Russia has suspended some of its debt payments, an epidemic of defaults could lead to further contraction as lenders—or taxpayers—cover losses rather than make new investments.

In short, the world stands poised between depression and recovery. Even if global depression is avoided, for many months and perhaps years, the instability of capitalism, always latent, will be dramatically evident.

The big-hitters of the world economy—the multinational CEOs, the G-7 ministers and the top investment bankers—are in a pickle. Consider the predicament of Greenspan and his fellow central bankers. They can respond by lowering interest rates. But there are limits. Japan's interest rates, after a September rate cut, are already so low that banks can borrow money at virtually zero interest, essentially for free. European rates are already low and the continent is absorbed in a shift, this January, to a single currency, the Euro, which itself carries inflationary risks.

The U.S. should cut rates, since relatively high returns on U.S. treasury bills are sucking funds from around the world, boosting the American economy but encouraging capital flight from the very countries that need cash the most. But even a U.S. rate cut won't calm the hysteria overseas. When Greenspan hinted on September 4 in Berkeley that he planned to cut rates, world stocks soared; the Dow Jones index posted its biggest single-day point gain in history. In the next few trading days, however, share losses wiped out the gains, erasing the vaunted Greenspan effect.

International agencies seem as flummoxed by the crisis as central bankers. The IMF doesn't have the money to stage any more grand bailouts, and shouldn't anyway. Its marauding days are over, at least for now. The fund is so tarnished by its repeated misreading of the crisis that it seems possible it could be killed off, or at least supplanted by a new body, once things calm down. "It is hard to believe that just a year ago the IMF was trumpeting a new global commitment to unfettered capital flows," Sachs writes in *The Economist*. "Almost all observers now concede that premature liberalization ... was one cause of the current crisis."

It will take time for the international elite to sort out a new

fix-it scheme for the world economy. "Not to sound like a vulgar Marxist, but the only consistency in these policies is the desire to protect a class of investors," says Folbre. "When currency controls support that objective there are currency controls. As soon as investors as a group require state subsidies and bailout, the checks get written."

Cash-strapped countries, however, can't wait for a one-size-fits-all solution to arrive from Washington. In the short run, aggrieved citizens, facing declining living standards, will pressure politicians into crafting local responses to the crisis. The two most practical options are

THE SUMMER OF 1998 AMOUNTS TO THE BIGGEST REPUDIATION THIS DECADE OF NEOLIBERAL ORTHODOXY.

actually variants of the neoliberal orthodoxy. But, under the circumstances, these options offer a real alternative to American-flavored capitalism since they place a greater value on social cohesion and government economic controls.

The first option is to follow Germany. In federal elections on September 27, voters are expected to elect a Social Democrat as chancellor, evicting Helmut Kohl from office after 16 years. The new chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, is expected to boost German efforts to stand apart from the United States and the United Kingdom, the chief proponents of neoliberalism. With ultra-high wages and welfare benefits, Germany would seem ripe for the kind of standards-lowering mania that has swept through the Anglo-Saxon world. But Germans instead talk confidently of defending their social contract in spite of intensifying global competition. The approach underscores what Berlin social critic Stephan Leibfried calls his country's "trust society." Rather than cut social entitlements, they should be strengthened, he argues, precisely in order to convince people "they can afford to take risks demanded by globalization."

The German approach is too expensive for most countries, so a second option, Asian paternalism, may attract followers. For a quarter-century, Asian countries posted strong growth through a combination of trade barriers and government subsidies for selected export industries. In Japan and Korea, the system worked so well that lifetime employment was the norm. In recent years, neoliberal critics have attacked such paternalism, claiming it masked inefficiencies and promoted stagnation. But compared to the free-fall

in, say, Indonesia, which has seen 20 years of economic gains wiped out in months, stagnation seems preferable. "People say Japan and Korea aren't ruthless enough, that they're not letting companies fail," Folbre says. "But they're doing so because they want to preserve a social contract. In the long run, they will fare better."

Defense of the social contract blends easily with government efforts to protect native capitalists. It is easy to imagine that by the time the crisis runs its course, U.S. and European multinationals could end up owning much bigger chunks of the developing world: factories, mines and forests, all picked up on the cheap. One way to avoid this is for governments to prop up sick owners. That might forestall the transfer of capital to a foreign elite from a domestic one. In the short run, such bailouts offer buffeted nations a chance to retain control of key sectors of the economy. This hardly guarantees a country will dig out of its mess, but the alternative may be worse.

"We're being praised, cajoled and bullied into opening up our economies," says Sura Sanittanont, a Thai investment banker in Bangkok. "But look at the terms we're offered. They are outrageous. If we agree, we will be reduced to a fiefdom for a long time."

That Thailand has long been a vassal of multinationals anyway is beside the point. In this crisis, there are degrees of hardship and humiliation. Success means merely limiting the carnage. ■

G. Pascal Zachary writes about world affairs and international business. He is the author, most recently, of *Endless Frontier: Vannevar Bush, Engineer of the American Century*.

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Turning to the Cities

A Metropolitan Agenda

By Joel Rogers

If "left" means anything anymore, it means "democracy." As applied to organizing our lives together, it means greater popular control over the terms and conditions of that life, and greater social justice inscribed in those terms. Most critically, perhaps, in a world in which politics will be forever materially conditioned, it means extending the principles of democracy—at least in this broad sense of greater popular control over social terms—to the economy itself.

Many on the left think that controlling the economy is beyond our capacity. I am more hopeful. The left can make a big difference in the organization of the economy, in a way that solves our greatest national economic problems. Where we choose to begin, moreover, can effectively unite the lineal descendants of the old left (unions) and the new left (feminists, environmentalists, civil rights) who have been divided since Vietnam.

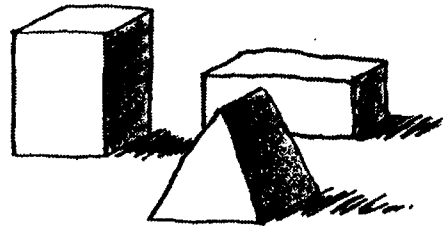
This requires a return to the city. Still the home to most of those "on our side," metropolitan areas are the site of the greatest squalor in the economy. And they are the places where rebuilding is most needed to change the destructive trends in the economy—sagging wages, flat productivity growth, rising inequality. Economic reconstruction at this regional level could provide the left with an enormous opportunity to solve a big problem, unite its ranks and regain its voice in American public life.

Cities and their surrounding inner-ring suburbs, where more than half of the U.S. population lives, are the neglected stepchildren of American politics. They suffer from all sorts of problems—from ghetto crime, unemployment and racial segregation to environmentally degrading and fiscally unbalanced suburban sprawl—yet they are not the subject of constructive political debate. Instead, discussion of our urban areas focuses on despair about economic dysfunction and social disintegration—and the resistance of both to political remedy.

That despair is justified, we are told, by an "Iron Law of Urban Decay": As incomes rise, workers move to suburbia; when suburbs mature, they resist paying taxes to support the metro core; as the tax base declines and services deteriorate, the middle-class flees. Poverty concentrates among those left behind, and they become "different"—disconnected from labor markets, lacking the human or financial capital even for bootstrap-pulling. The best that can be hoped for in central cities is peace, or at least a segregation of the violence. The best that can be hoped for in suburbia is ... more suburbia.

It does not have to be this way. Taking full advantage of their dense concentrations of people, skill and infrastructure, we could transform our metropolitan areas from sites of squalor, stark inequality and numbing natural destruction to vibrant centers of high wage and environmentally sustainable economic activity and civil social life. The benefits would be massive. Most directly, metro reconstruction would markedly

BACK to BASICS



improve the welfare of urban populations. More broadly, it would substantially address the ruinous inequality and declining living standards of our economy. Finally, such reconstruction would have large political and social benefits. We would regain some measure of democracy and social peace by focusing resources where most people actually live.

How did cities get into their current mess? There is no simple answer, but an important piece of the puzzle lies in American public policy. A bias against cities, evident in contemporary public discourse, is a long-standing feature of the American political economy. It plays a central role in our tax code, major economic development programs, government purchasing and other exercises of public power.

In contrast to most developed capitalist nations, American public policy slights urban renters in favor of suburban homeowners, urban bus and subway riders in favor of suburban car drivers, and urban infrastructure in favor of exurban and rural development projects. Since non-metro regions are not required to pay the costs of maintaining the poor and dispossessed left behind by such acts of favoritism, the general effect has been to artificially lower the costs—to individuals and firms—of living and working outside or on the outer fringes of our metro regions, while artificially increasing the costs of living and working within them.

Though hard to calculate precisely, the subsidy to non-urban regions is on all counts considerable—tens if not hundreds of billions annually. We have spent trillions building non-metro roads, but nowhere near that on metro ones or mass transit. Federal annual funding for mass transit has never been more than a fifth of highway funding, and state ratios are even more unbalanced. The overwhelming share of federal and state economic development funding also goes to non-metro sites—more highways, sprawl-supporting infrastructure, exurban tax credits and low-interest loans for new development. Similarly, the deliberate siting of military bases and other government facilities outside cities or more developed regions remains a deliberate national policy.

There are two reasons to oppose these policies: one of political morality, the other of economic rationality. On the political side, lots of people live in cities and are likely to remain there; democracy is supposed to be "for the people"—

all of them. With 130 million people in our urban areas, and 80 million (20 million of them children) in their declining central cities, anti-urban policies aren't acceptable. Large portions of this population are extremely poor and subject to exceptional violence. No one disputes the results—high infant mortality, poor health, stunted development and shattered lives. Not only is this physically and psychologically destructive to those on the receiving end, it is also corrosive to the culture of our democracy. As urban areas decay, despair and hopelessness

How can the left develop a more relevant and broader role in American politics?

In the spirit of "Back to Basics," In These Times asked people on the left to answer this question. The answers appear throughout the following pages.

feeds on itself, increasing crime and violence; government becomes more of a mechanism for policing rather than governing, and urban residents are driven away from participating in democratic institutions. The economic and social distance between suburbs and the city becomes a political wedge.

On the economic side, anti-urbanism is also costly. For starters, sprawl and central city degradation is wasteful. It wastes land, water and energy, and squanders existing assets; as new houses, factories and schools go up in the outer rings, perfectly good buildings get boarded up further in. Take the excess costs on new construction and natural resources, add in the untimely depreciation of old capital stock, and it's easily \$300 billion in annual waste.

Then there are the economic costs of human neglect. Abandoning our central cities means forsaking the productive potential of their inhabitants while paying heavily to contain their resentment. The opportunity costs of all that unrealized potential productivity are enormous. Forget about the hidden future Nobel Prize winners. Simply subtract the average lifetime earnings of those without decent health care, education or job access from those with these basic goods. Multiply by 80 million, or even 20. It's a big number—in the trillions—which translates into a lot of foregone tax revenue for the general population.

Furthermore, there is cost linkage. Many suburbanites are prepared to pay the costs and forego the benefits just mentioned as the price of their isolation. But that isolation is an illusion. Within regions, the economic fortunes of central cities and their suburbs, especially their inner-ring suburbs, are increasingly entwined. By the late '80s, across a very wide range of metro regions, every \$1,000 gained or lost in per capita city income was associated with \$690 gained or lost in per capita suburban income. Rotting central cities mean a poorer suburban future.

The really big cost, however, derives from the role that metro regions play in determining the pattern of national economic activity. Put baldly, revived urban regions are key to reversing the present stagnation in American living standards. Despite all the talk about how American wages are now set in Beijing, adverse trends in American income (including income distribution) result less from the downward pressures of international competition than from domestic policy choices. In response to

new competitive pressures, we have made "low-road" strategies too easy and "high-road" strategies too hard. Low-road firms compete by keeping prices down, which means keeping costs down—beginning, typically, with wages. Applied across the economy, low-road strategies lead to sweated workers, economic insecurity, rising inequality, poisonous labor relations and degraded natural environments.

In contrast, high-road firms focus on "value competition" (with higher wages supported by customer willingness to pay for higher quality, better design and superior service) and require continual innovation, and thus depend on more skilled and cooperative workers. Firms can make money on either path, but social gains are vastly greater on the high road. The principal failure of the past two decades—and it is political as much as it is economic—is that we have not provided the social supports—effective educational institutions and an advanced infrastructure, for instance—to move to the high road.

Whatever their present difficulties, metropolitan economies are the natural base for a high-road economy. To the extent that we now have any "high-road" production and service delivery in the United States, it is heavily concentrated in metropolitan regions. This correlation between metro regions and the high-road strategy is no accident: A high-road strategy must be a metro strategy because the high road requires the sheer density of people and firms found only in cities.

To make the high road a viable option, we need an array of new policies. At the federal and state levels, the essential tasks are to keep states and communities from pursuing a competitive race to the bottom, raise minimum standards on firm performance and get out of the way of the organizing needed to realize gains from cooperation. None of this requires any new public expenditures.

Studs Terkel, historian

"We have a new word in our vocabulary called 'temps.' In Of Mice and Men, George and Lenny are temps. They worked on a ranch. Now they work next door to you. We have temps in law firms, banks and teaching. A large percentage of our work force is temps with no job security, no unions. UPS won that strike last year because people recognized how close it was to them. We have the New Party, the Labor Party, the Green Party, the Alliance for Democracy. When in the fuck are we going to have a national convention of all of them? As they say, it is one big union."

First, federal and state governments should remove subsidies for low-roading. Government should not award contracts or development grants to firms paying wages below some minimum level, polluting above a certain level, etc. They should then mandate such standards generally, and gradually raise them. For example, phasing in a massively increased minimum wage—say, to \$10 an hour within five years—would do wonders for shutting down the low-road option and requiring firms to compete by improving quality. (Of course, there is no point in urging firms on to a high road only to push them off a cliff. So this first element must be treated as part of the larger project.)

Governments, which often spend billions simply to lure busi-

ness from one region to another with no net gain for the national economy, must discourage these bidding wars. One way to do this would be to tax any government bids at the next highest level of government (the federal government taxing the states, the states their local governments), or to condition aid from those higher levels on participation in non-aggression pacts. Of course, one region's "subsidy" is another's "investment for the future," so we need criteria to distinguish genuine investment that might also be expected to lure firms—for example, education spending—from direct payoffs.

As a general rule of public policy, we should spend the money where the people are. Development supports to regions should be targeted on a per capita basis. Let the natural agglomerations of people and firms be rewarded by allowing them to recapture their individual tax dollars for collective self-improvement. Here too there are important issues of design (e.g., not having incentives to agglomeration so intense as to encourage insupportable population growth within regions). But progress toward per capita equalization is reasonable on economic, social and democratic grounds.

Then, we should encourage the growth of economic development authorities on a functional, regional basis. While more than half the population lives in metro regions, only six percent is subject to any significant metro government authorities. Moreover, the sheer number of sovereign sub-jurisdictions in these regions poses formidable barriers to planning. The Chicago metropolitan region, for example, includes 265 separate municipalities, 1,200 separate tax districts and parts of six different mega-counties. State and federal government could condition aid on the development of lower-level regional administrative structures.

Finally, we should directly encourage high-roading: In all aspects of economic development spending, infrastructure support, pollution prevention and abatement programs, government should reward regions or states that move toward high-road production.

Higher levels of government, however, can only do so much to foster metro reconstruction. To be sure, moving the national economy onto a high road would be of manifest national benefit. But because a high road policy must be a metro policy, regions themselves must play a large role in designing and implementing it. They need to break squarely with the conventional economic development strategy (hereafter, CEDS) still pursued by most cities and counties—the strategy that lies behind the Iron Law of Urban Decay—in favor of a high-road project that takes full advantage of metro density.

CEDS adapts to urban decline by promoting job growth without concern for the kind of jobs generated. But low-wage jobs drag down wages elsewhere, encourage further low-roading, eat away at the margin of struggling high-road firms, and draw on the tax base without proportionately contributing to it. Tax-base erosion leads to cutbacks in public goods and suburban flight: the Iron Law, again. The strategy is perversely self-enforcing: As the city gets more squalid, desperation fuels the view that jobs, any jobs at all, are what is needed, and that

the only alternative to low-wage employment is no employment at all. A natural alternative is to direct dollars only to jobs of a certain kind, while building supports for them. Localities should make it easier for "good" employers to stay and expand by providing a variety of services and opportunities for their improvement and competitiveness, while making it harder for "bad" employers to do so by insisting on certain standards on wages, pollution prevention and so on.

CEDS focuses on attracting business rather than retaining and renewing the existing base of firms. It squanders one of the greatest assets of density, which is the natural grouping of similar firms. Mature metropolitan economies thrive when their core businesses upgrade, link to one another, or attract or spin off related enterprises that benefit from spatial proximity to existing industry leaders. But upgrading, networking and incubating indigenous firms requires an infrastructure of support (technical assistance, training, and the efficient supply of modern public goods). An alternative development strategy would focus on retention,

renewal, upgrading, linkage and incubation of existing firms—with local authorities investing in the infrastructure needed to realize gains from agglomeration. Through "early warning/early intervention" networks, they would recruit firms and workers to monitor the signs of distress in challenged firms, and develop the technical and financial wherewithal to save jobs worth saving. At the same time, they would actively promote cross-firm learning and sectoral growth by encouraging firms to join together in marketing their products and training workers. Drawing on the accumulated pension and other savings in the region, they would develop regional investment funds to support such intervention and increase community ownership of firms doing business there.

CEDS relies on generic tax abatements and other fiscal giveaways, rather than targeted breaks and regulation. Again, the best evidence is that such enterprise zone-type development models simply do not work, and eventually erode the city's fiscal base. The jobs generated are seldom high-paying or associated with significant capital investment; the firms take the benefits and move on. But, by a gradual tightening of regulatory controls on production standards—whether minimum labor costs or emissions standards—business can be encouraged to innovate in ways that improve both productivity and the quality of community life. Doing this, however, requires a willingness to impose significant costs on current business, while insulating it from competition from non-complying competitors. An alternative would set performance conditions on the receipt of public funds—tying subsidies to the achievement of specific ends. The more extensive the support from the government and allied private institutions, the more extensive the demands that could reasonably be made on the firms receiving it.

CEDS sees greater public control and accountability as bad for the economy, and it worries when unions and community organizations put pressure on economic policy. Yet modern economies operate best when they can rely on a fair degree of public support for business goals—support best achieved

**Karen Nussbaum, AFL-CIO
Working Women's Department**

"For starters let's understand how most Americans view the world. Many people are confused about the difference between right and left, but they are very clear that the wealthy and the corporations aren't on their side."

when the public has significant say in setting those goals. The alternative would continue to let markets do what they do best—allocate scarce resources efficiently and punish the non-competitive—but it would be unabashed in letting public authority and popular organizations say something about what the goals of economic activity should be. It would explicitly assign non-government institutions with local knowledge a role in economic administration.

CEDS neglects the role that public goods of many kinds—from the traditional “economic” ones of transportation, education and training to the “social” ones of recreation, safety and clean environments—play in a local economy. Since no individual firm is able to provide this economic and social infrastructure on its own, the decision about whether or not to provide it is among the most crucial that local economic development authorities can make. But the ability of such authorities to provide infrastructure depends directly on the population of high-riding firms and associations with a stake in it: The failure to provide decent infrastructure will drive that population down to the point that authorities will only be able to attract low-road firms. Instead of neglecting high-road infrastructure, we should build it. Sometimes this would mean serious investment—as in effective transit systems connecting job seekers to work throughout the region. More often, it would mean fostering cooperation among existing interests, or simply convening players who know what the problems are, but who have had no incentive from a public authority to solve them.

Consider the effects of systematically pursuing such a program. Sprawl would be reduced, planning capacity would rise, wages would increase, neighborhoods would become less segregated and safer—and democracy would more evidently show its contribution to the economy. The strategy would be self-reinforcing: As subsidies to sprawl decrease, the attractions of metropolitan locations rise. As investment returns to metro cores, productivity within them increases, making higher wages more affordable. Better wages secure the tax base; that helps pay for the expensive public goods which both further reduce inequality and attract high-riding firms.

Across the country, you can already find different pieces of the project I am recommending here. A few regions do have sensible planning policies, tax-base sharing between rich and poor neighborhoods, regional standards on zoning—including, critically, fair housing policies that put poor minorities next to opportunity. Many cities and counties, and some states, have passed “living wage” or “anti-subsidy abuse” legislation. Many local planning and development departments have begun to target their resources toward the improvement of existing clusters of firms. But these efforts remain exceptions. Faced with continued low-riding competition, they are hard to sustain. With the possible exception of Portland, none is comprehensive—putting the governance, planning, finance, standards, supports and popular organization pieces together. None enjoys appropriate support from the state and federal governments. Few, therefore, have reached critical mass, tipping the dynamics of their regions.


Still, the fact that so many initiatives are already in motion, suggests a wide-ranging potential alliance out there, waiting to be organized. The current scene pits labor against community, the employed against environmentalists and central cities against the inner-ring, while obscuring relevant divisions with-

in business, and letting the rich exurbs off too cheaply. But many of the mutual antagonists in this old politics are beginning to see an interest in alliance. White-dominated labor increasingly recognizes that its declining city membership no longer suffices to protect it against low-wage privatization and the destruction of regional labor market standards, let alone to assure the public investments needed to support high-wage production and services. It needs the voting support of (heavily disorganized) central city black, Latino and Asian populations. Those populations, in turn, know better than to count on an increased welfare effort or expanded public sector. They need private sector investment, jobs in their communities, and access to outside jobs that pay a living wage. Increasingly, they recognize that these things are more likely achieved if they are allied with unions.

Inner-ring suburbanites, who are in many cases losing employment at faster rates than the central cities, are learning that the same low-wage sprawl that has almost destroyed the central cities is now destroying them. And both central city and inner-ring recognize their common interest in getting the rich suburbs to carry their share of regional burdens. Finally, metro business itself, at least that part of it that cannot easily flee, is interested in kicking out the crutches under the low-riders now taking away their business.

This is precisely the sort of encompassing, but tractable project that could define a new progressive regional politics. Put these forces together in any metro region and you have a powerful political coalition. While lots of obstacles might obstruct its achievement, material interest strongly supports this coalition. And recent experience in mobilizing directly on that interest—be it the grass-roots Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee, legislative efforts at more tax-base sharing in the Twin Cities, or the more business-led efforts in places like Cleveland—suggest the possibilities of a real movement. What are most urgently needed are some enterprising politicians, labor leaders, savvy community organizers or sensible metro business people to get in front of a parade that’s waiting for them. ■

Joel Rogers is co-founder of the New Party.

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Roll the Union On

Rebuilding the Labor Movement

By Nelson Lichtenstein

For the first time in two generations, the American trade union movement stands, in both fact and imagination, on the left side of American political culture. We have arrived at this point in a circuitous fashion. Since the entire political spectrum has moved far to the right, a set of politics that at one time stood for low-profile centrism—the defense of social security, public education and collective bargaining—now marks a person as a radical. Labor's partisans have found many of their old allies missing in action. To defend themselves, the unions have had to look left to men and women once held at arms length.

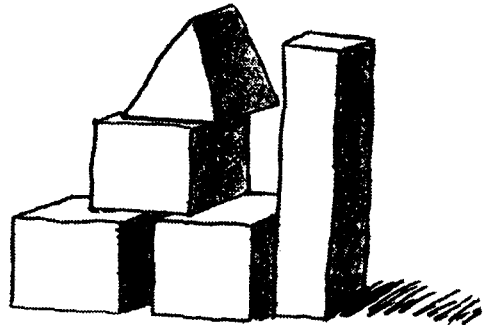
This process of ideological regrouping was further advanced by two events: the end of the Cold War and the remarkable set of events that put John J. Sweeney and company in command of the AFL-CIO. The Cold War's end helped undermine the domestic "Berlin Wall" that had for so long divided and distracted American labor leadership from those who should have been union supporters. This set the stage for the ascent of John Sweeney and his team in 1995. Now that the Sweeney-ites have been in office for three years, it is clear they have no magical formula for union revival—but things have changed.

Unlike the old guard, Sweeney understands the magnitude of the problem confronting unions. Labor must organize 300,000 new members each year just to maintain its current size in relation to the growth of the work force. To restore its relative strength to the modest level union labor enjoyed in the '70s will require something close to a social revolution, a wholesale transformation in the politics and culture of the nation.

History does not repeat itself, nor does it offer a formula for social change, but the upheaval inside the AFL-CIO bears a resemblance to the dramatic transformation in union leadership that launched the Committee for Industrial Organization—the CIO—more than 60 years ago. If we think about what happened then, maybe we can make that history work for us today.

Both John L. Lewis and Sweeney moved to unionism's center stage because a Democratic president had failed them. Although we now remember the 1935 Wagner Act as the keystone of New Deal labor legislation, Lewis, Sidney Hillman and other unionists initially staked far more upon President Roosevelt's first effort to make organized labor a part of the New Deal: the National Recovery Administration. Under the NRA, big corporations were given a free ride to set prices and cartelize production. In return, the government asserted that workers had a right to "unions of their own choosing." This was the famous Section 7a, which Lewis' organizers translated to mean, "The president wants you to join a union." In the coal fields and garment shops, trade

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unionism revived quickly. But when unionists tried to organize in what was then the core of the economy—autos, steel, rubber—they found that the big corporations had a very different interpretation—company unionism—and the federal government did nothing about it.

President Clinton tried to cut a similar kind of social bargain during the first two years of his administration: He'd let a handful of big insurance companies run the health care system in return for universal coverage, and he expected the commission chaired by former Secretary of Labor John Dunlop, to make union organizing easier in private sector, white collar work. In return, managers would get a chance to set up employee participation committees designed to increase productivity and competitiveness. Both of these schemes were marginal bargains at best, likely to fail in practice even if they had slipped through Congress during Clinton's first two years in office.

But whatever their intrinsic merit, old guard labor leaders were paralyzed when the reforms of both Roosevelt and Clinton foundered. The Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional in 1935; 60 years later, Newt Gingrich smashed Clinton's effort to revive even a tepid version of the New Deal. During the '30s, the AFL offered no response to the collapse of the NRA or even to the new opportunities offered by the Wagner Act: Its leaders clung to an underfunded, ethnocentric, craft union strategy. Lewis and Hillman founded the CIO in 1935 because they saw only disaster and decline in the AFL non-program. Likewise, Sweeney and his allies repudiated AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland three years ago because the latter had no new ideas to cope with the collapse of Clinton's social program. For years, Kirkland had argued that it was useless to pour money into new organizing campaigns until there was a new labor law on the books. But Sweeney's approach has been based on the sounder history: "We'll organize now without the law, so that we can later organize under the law." This was precisely the strategy of the new CIO, which scored all its great victories before the Supreme Court validated the Wagner Act in April 1937.

The new unions of the '30s and '40s played a decisive role in transforming an immigrant, industrial peasantry into an organized body of social citizens whose political weight reshaped the American polity for two generations. The Roosevelt landslides of the '30s were a product not of Republican crossover voters (African-Americans were the big exception here) but of Democratic Party mobilization of a whole stratum of alienated immigrants into an electoral coalition that dominated politics for the next 30 years.

This history is useful today because it may well clarify some of the obstacles and possibilities confronting the contemporary labor movement. The first point to note is that the union revival of the '30s, as well as the public sector growth spurt in the '60s, was based on a massive transformation in the political culture of both the working class and the larger polity. These revivals were not a product of a shift in the organization of American capitalism or of the structural characteristics of American trade unionism. This assessment has contemporary relevance because many management theorists argue that the unions are irrelevant to our computerized, post-Fordist world, even as laborite thinkers stretch their imaginations, dreaming up new forms of unionism—associational, occupational, professional, non-adversarial—that will enable labor to once again play a functional role in the reproduction of capital.

This sort of speculation is not entirely irrelevant, but it pales into insignificance when juxtaposed with the animating ideological and cultural transformations that are the key to union growth and vitality. Just as the "industrial democracy" idea proved a potent impulse from 1890 to 1940, so too must the labor movement become identified with a central idea that appeals both to the working class and to the larger political public.

What might such an idea embody? An attack on the nation's growing social inequality is certainly one potent, necessary idea; the advance toward a shorter workday is another, one whose appeal to working women needs little elaboration. Today, however, the most powerful and historically rooted social ideology available to the union movement is that of the rights consciousness that emerged in the '60s and '70s. Despite a generation of conservative assault, the legitimacy of rights discourse remains near hegemonic almost across the political and social spectrum. Indeed, the most startling disjuncture faced by American progressives arises from the sharp dichotomy that puts the "civil rights" of workers in one conceptual box, and the collective work place rights of those same employees in another.

I was struck by this dichotomy when I visited my local Burger King to pick up an employment application for my 16-year-old son. Right at the top, under the heading "Equal Employment Opportunity Employer" was this bold assertion: "Employer does not discriminate in employment because of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, marital status, or liability for service in the armed forces of the United States."

This statement is on the Burger King application for two

reasons. First, it is the law of the land. Second, Americans consider discrimination on the basis of race and religion and creed "un-American." Of course, there is a debate as to the meaning of "non-discrimination," and the way in which society can make up for past discrimination. But the overwhelming majority of workers, employers and politicians believe that the government has a right to insist that active discrimination not take place against anyone covered by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

But when it comes to the rights of workers as mere employees, the spirit of the Burger King application is entirely different. On the back there's a bit of boilerplate language that asserts the right of the corporation "to terminate my employment at any time for any reason, or for no reason. ... Employment handbooks, manuals, personnel policies and procedures are not employment contracts and do not modify my status as an at-will employee."

This ideological dichotomy—between civil and workers rights—represents an unprecedented opportunity for the labor movement. Just as the CIO made the generation-long quest for "industrial democracy" a powerful theme that legitimized its strikes and organizing campaigns, so too can the contemporary labor movement capitalize upon the nation's well-established "rights" culture of the last 40 years. Indeed, the AFL-CIO is now in the midst of a concerted effort to make "The Right to Organize" a part of our broader civil rights culture. This is not an entirely new idea, but it needs to be pushed forward with vigor, intelligence and commitment.

**Ellen Miller, executive director
of Public Campaign**

"The issue of a comprehensive campaign finance reform has to be integrated into every activist line of work, whether it is social justice, environmental pollution or peace issues, because it is the reform that makes all other reforms possible. Until we solve the way private money selects candidates and determines public policies, we will never begin to address democratic solutions to these problems."

To give this ideological campaign the kind of concrete political and organizational meaning that can generate a massive shift in the nation's political culture, I offer three propositions:

First, the union movement needs more militancy. But even more important, American labor as a whole needs to stand behind those exem-

plary instances of class combat when they occur. The '80s were a tragic decade for American labor, not because workers did not fight, but because when they did take a stand—at International Paper in Jay, Maine, at Hormel in Austin, Minnesota, and at Continental and Greyhound—their struggles were both physically isolated and ideologically devalued. We remember Pullman in 1894, Lawrence in 1912, Gastonia in 1929 and Memphis in 1968, not because the workers engaged in those strikes were any more militant or victorious than those of the '80s, but because the labor movement as a whole—and liberal and left-wing intellectuals in particular—defended these struggles and gave them a transcendent meaning. This raising of the stakes contributed to success in the United Parcel Service strike in August 1997; the failure to do so led to the invisibility of the General Motors conflict this year.

The second key is internal union democracy. Unions need

tens of thousands of new organizers; but the AFL-CIO cannot recruit, train and deploy such an army, and even if it could, "organizers" who parachute into a campaign are far less effective than those who are part of the community and the work place. Such a homegrown group cannot be recruited in the absence of a democratic union culture. Unfortunately, thousands of local unions—and not a few national or international organizations—are job trusts that exist to protect the incomes of an entrenched stratum of long-service officials. Democratization threatens their security, but without it the union movement will remain a shell.

Finally, the road to a revitalized union movement lies not just through a vigorous organizing drive, but through politics as well. Here, following the footsteps of John L. Lewis is more problematic. Early in the 20th century, Samuel Gompers first declared, "Reward your friends and punish your enemies." Three decades later, Lewis ordered UAW radicals to drop their support of a Farmer-Labor Party and endorse President Roosevelt if they wanted \$100,000 from the CIO treasury to organize General Motors. Such hard-nosed, seemingly pragmatic calculation has long captured the essence of mainstream labor's political activism. Sweeney's stepped-up political commitment to Clinton and the Democrats in the 1996 campaign season lay squarely within this venerable tradition.

But such a pragmatic calculus is not enough, for politics is not simply a question of rewarding friends and punishing enemies. Instead, a political party can be far more: An educational

instrument that crystallizes an entire world view and generates a compelling vision of social change. In the fall of 1936, when FDR ran for re-election on a radical platform that condemned the "money-changers and economic royalists," he brought millions of workers into the streets and set the stage for the dramatic sit-down strikes that followed two months later. The Democratic Party never has played such a role again.

Labor-based political parties have been almost universal in the industrial West because they arise out of compelling logic that urges unionized labor to reach beyond its own ranks and forge alliances with those natural allies who are either unorganized or immobilized. Today, no trade unionist would dare to hope that the Democrats might actually become the kind of party that spoke forthrightly on behalf of labor.

Labor, therefore, needs its own voice, as well as its own party. Because the obstacles to the latter remain formidable, the need for the unions to have an independent profile within our political culture becomes even more important. Such a task requires not simply money for TV ads, but a public posture that puts an abrasive edge between the labor movement and the ambiguous politics of even the most progressive Democrats. Such independence breeds not isolation, but respect, leverage and legitimacy in our increasingly atomized and ambiguous world. ■

Nelson Lichtenstein, a professor of labor history at the University of Virginia, is a founding member of *Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice*.

Greening Unions

By Barbara Dudley

Unions and environmentalists in the United States long have been strange and reluctant bedfellows. Yet an alliance between these groups makes a lot of sense. Both have sizable constituencies and income, and together they could effect some significant changes in the political priorities of this country.

To make that alliance real, however, they will have to overcome a lot of mutual distrust and ill will. For too long both camps have been bamboozled by corporate public relations machines that have pitted them against each other. Any polluting corporation worth its salt knows which politicians and PR firms to hire to counteract community opposition. And the first cry raised is always about the jobs the company will bring to an impoverished area. Local residents know intuitively what the statistics confirm: The new jobs won't go to the poor people—white or black—who live in the neighborhood. But there will be jobs, and thus politicians usually are willing to overlook the negative health and environmental impacts. Similarly, unions will also support a new plant, particularly if it is to be built and operated by union labor.

This jobs versus environment duality, however, is simply false. Environmentally sound work is almost always more labor intensive than environmentally destructive production. In everything from garbage collection and logging to farming and dry cleaning, if you use fewer chemicals, fewer machines and more people, you create jobs and save the environment.

For the most part, it's not jobs that are at stake but short-term profits. Shifting to safe, renewable energy sources must happen someday—either before or after climate change takes hold with a vengeance. But U.S. industry fights change for fear of having to invest in new technologies or new designs and thus losing a slight edge in this quarter's earnings. Meanwhile, Japanese, German and Danish companies are quickly dominating the solar and wind energy market. In the long run, that's how U.S. jobs are going to be lost.

Some chemicals can be made and used safely. It is possible to develop "closed loop" systems for many factory processes, emitting no poisons or pollutants into the environment. But there are some chemicals and heavy metals that simply can't continue to be produced or used without serious long-term damage to the planet. If such chemicals are to be phased out, environmentalists must work with unions to develop transition plans to provide workers in that industry with viable options. Workers are wary of politicians (and environmentalists) who promise dead-end "job-retraining," while well-paid union jobs are lost to mechanization and free trade. Retraining, Clinton style, leads at best to low-wage, nonunion, service-sector jobs, which often simply prolong the time before unemployment benefits run out. More creativity and political risks must be taken with the concept of "just transition" to overcome worker resistance—especially if their jobs are killing them. ■

Barbara Dudley is the former executive director of *Greenpeace*.

Fresh Air

The Unconventional Orlando Patterson

By Salim Muwakkil

Everybody's trying to claim Orlando Patterson. In his writings, the Harvard professor has presented ideas so fresh, cogent and free of ideological cant, that partisans all along the political spectrum want to draft him into their ranks. After nearly 30 years of toil in the Ivy League's rarified atmosphere, Patterson has gained the public's attention for the insights his rigorous scholarship provides on topical problems.

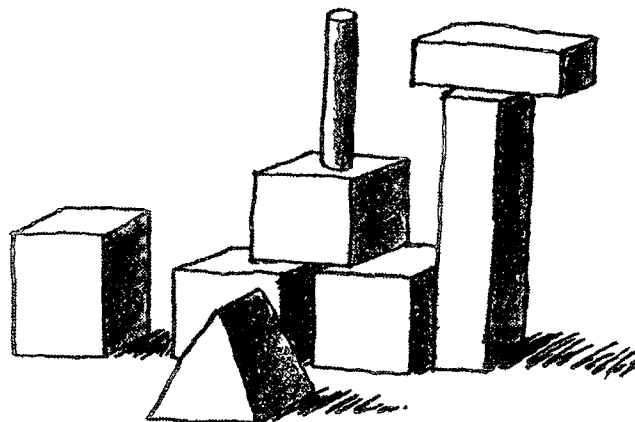
Patterson's work is a refreshing antidote to our stale national discourse on race. His *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (Basic Books) won the 1991 National Book Award and gained him popular acclaim for his ability to illuminate history's dark corners with a subtle glow. His latest book, *The Ordeal of Integration* (Civitas/Counterpoint) focuses Patterson's iconoclastic sensibilities on the problems of race in America, and he offers readers an arsenal of challenges to conventional wisdom.

Although he thinks of himself as a man of the left, Patterson's recent notoriety has come primarily as a critic of liberalism. These days he is more likely to be found on the pages of right-leaning publications like *Commentary* and *The New Republic* than in the journals of the left. His optimistic views on the country's racial progress have gained him visibility in many conservative venues, primarily to help support their conceit that the United States has become a color-blind society. And while he is a part of Harvard's highly vaunted Afro-American Studies Department, which includes academic superstars like Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates and William Julius Wilson, Patterson seems indifferent to notions of a racial mission. In fact, he is quite contemptuous of what he calls "professional race advocates."

Patterson also is deeply critical of the left's tendency to indulge these race advocates by exaggerating the country's racial difficulties. In his mind, the widespread notion among black Americans that racial problems are intractable becomes self-fulfilling and plays into the hands of racist extremists. Such ideas of permanent racism, he argues, also reinforce the left's social-determinist arguments and reduce "Afro-Americans" (his preferred nomenclature) to permanent victims, eternally bereft of agency.

His willingness to provide candid criticism of liberals ("one is more critical of the people whom one feels closest to," Patterson told *The Boston Phoenix*) may have endeared him to the right, but Patterson is no conservative. He firmly believes that aggressive government action is needed on behalf of the poor and he is derisive of the right's reverence for market-based solutions. "The surrender to market forces and advocacy of government inaction in the face of nightmarish ghettos, growing impoverishment in the midst of affluence, spreading homelessness, inadequate health insurance for millions of working people, and multigenerational rural poverty are themselves dehumanized forms of determinism," he wrote

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in *Ordeal*. "There is no logical or moral difference between dependence on the tyranny of the marketplace and dependence on government."

A native of Jamaica who came of age in the midst of anti-colonial struggle but has lived in the United States for nearly 30 years, Patterson is both an outsider and a national product. After coming to Harvard in 1969, his specialty was Caribbean sociology. During the '70s, he also served as an adviser to Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley, a democratic socialist. It was that experience, he said later, that turned him against "all totalizing ideologies." During the early '80s, Patterson spent time researching and writing *Slavery and Social Death*, the book that suggested the idea for his award-winning *Freedom*, and writing articles that brought

Howard Zinn, historian

"For the left to broaden its influence, it needs to locate a central issue which is crucial to all others, and around which a broad national movement can form. That issue, I believe, is the redistribution of wealth. Racism, sexism, homophobia, environmental poisoning—while they all need to be fought head-on in their own right—first require taking money from the military and from the super-rich and then using it to eliminate poverty, clean up the environment and guarantee health care, jobs, childcare and education for all. The public is far ahead of the political mainstream, I believe, in a New Deal approach—yes, big government on behalf of the people—to dealing with national problems. We need to reach that public, understanding its openness to even radical solutions, through alternative media and through utilization of the mainstream media to whatever extent possible."

**Barbara Ehrenreich, author and honorary chair
of Democratic Socialists of America**

"What strikes me is that events may happen that make the left more relevant, if we are ready to be more relevant. The left is certainly relevant if there is an economic crash, which may be coming very soon. The question is, will we have anything more to say other than 'I told you so'?"

his unique insight and considerable scholarship to bear on the contemporary problems of race.

All along he was developing a reputation a contrarian, uttering uncomfortable truths and offering unorthodox solutions. While he acknowledges the enormous progress made by African-Americans since the days of segregation, he nonetheless blames black leadership for perpetuating a "culture of victimization." Patterson attributes this to the widespread acceptance of social determinism. "To constantly explain away one's failures as being produced by one's environment, or worse, as the doing of another 'race' or class ... is to reduce oneself to the level of an object, and further to prolong one's dependency on that other group of environment," he writes in *Ordeal*. "Any suggestion that an Afro-American person might be responsible, even in some minor way, for his or her condition invites the knee-jerk response that one is blaming the victim."

And, indeed, he has been accused of such a crime. Writer and critic Ishmael Reed has denounced him as one of a group of "black-pathology careerists" who are in league with the right-wing establishment to justify a rollback in social programs and continued black oppression. Reed counts Harvard's entire Afro-American Studies Department as among those collaborating forces; he calls it a "cultural Vichy regime."

Patterson also has been lumped, somewhat inappropriately, with a growing group of liberal thinkers (Todd Gitlin, Jim Sleeper, Randall Kennedy and others), who insistently urge the left to beat a hasty retreat from identity politics. Like them, he argues that race has no biological reality and is an imprecise method of categorizing individuals. He also shares their disdain of social scientists who tend to homogenize African-Americans as a single group perennially beset by crises and intractable dilemmas. "The traditional racist assumption that all Afro-Americans are an inferior caste of loafers finds its direct counterpart in the liberal racist assumptions that all Afro-Americans are helpless victims of institutional and individual 'racial' forces over which they have absolutely no control."

But Patterson does not fit easily into their ranks. For one thing, he supports affirmative action and other compensatory efforts to repair past group damage. "No society can exist without recognition of some kind of groups and group claim," he says. Just as governments assist victims of natural disasters, he argues, they have an obligation to assist victims

Abdul Alkalimat, Black Radical Congress

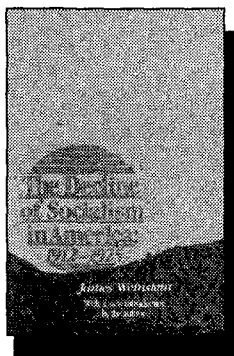
"The left must root itself more firmly in the workers' and poor peoples' movements. The left is not white, middle class and college educated. Of course, it is all these things, but in the main it is black and brown and poor. But the black left is languishing as a class force in urban forbidden zones. The self-proclaimed intellectual left must be challenged to commit class suicide, relocate into the forbidden zones and gather up the only forces that will make left politics a dominant force."

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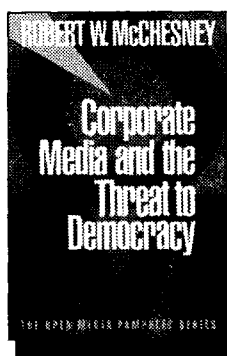


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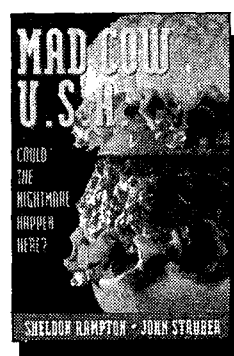


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of sustained discrimination.

He excoriates progressives for failing to demand more governmental assistance in the landmark welfare reform legislation embraced by the Clinton administration. "The left should have had a firm position on that legislation that would have prevented its passage without sufficient assistance to those thrown of the welfare roles," Patterson argues. But, he adds, progressives were "caught unaware, ineffectively holding on to old, discredited positions and ... reduced to playing catch-up."

Although this argument aligns Patterson with the position of most black leaders, he generally is at odds with them. He complains that they have too vested an interest in victimization and thus are loathe to acknowledge racial progress. In his mind, the biggest issue in the country is the growth of economic inequality. That's not a problem of race, he notes, but of economic structure. "Too often we 'racialize' problems that are more issues of class," he says.

Patterson is not surprised that black leadership often gets things wrong. "One of our most faulty assumptions is that Afro-American leadership is operating in the interest of the masses of black people," he says. "They are not." One of the more salient examples, he argues, is the issue of racial gerrymandering. "There are considerable data demonstrating that Afro-American interests are better served when they are part of a swing vote rather than an isolated voting block."

He points to black leaders' resistance to real housing reform as another indication of how they put their interest before the needs of their constituents. "Do we want to keep the ghettos intact or get rid of them?" he asks. "Well, most Afro-American leadership wants to improve the ghettos. Again, all of the research shows that poor Afro-Americans living in the ghetto have four strikes against them from the beginning and that their chances for success improve dramatically when they leave." Yet, Patterson says, black leadership, for the most part, doesn't want them to leave because it would diminish their electoral numbers or their political capital.

**Katherine Sciacchitano,
George Meany Center for Labor Studies**

"The debacle of Clinton's welfare reform initiative teaches us that there is no such thing as slipping progressive reforms into a conservative agenda. The repeal of AFDC was a beachhead in a much larger economic political and social battle by capital to redistribute wealth upward, deregulate capital and labor markets, and disarm government as a tool for any purpose other than increasing profit. Ultimately, the attack is against the very notion of social solidarity and the foundation it provides for economic and political democracy. To remake welfare into a basis for social solidarity, the left needs to defend economic and political democracy not only nationally, but globally. This means responding to the neoliberal economic agenda with a call for radical redistribution of wealth and income, reregulation of capital and labor markets, and organization of the international economy on the basis of the need for human development and security rather than free-market competition."

**Bob Wages, president of the
Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers**

"The left always somehow finds a way to hopelessly divide itself. It is clear to me that there are vast numbers of progressive people who care about the environment, consumer issues and the massive accumulation of capital. They outnumber the right wing. We have to all, of whatever stripe, come to a basic agreement to ditch politics as usual and create a new presence. Unions have to help lead this common agenda because that is where the money is. And we have to recognize that it is going to be painful, because while we are organizing whatever this movement is, the powers that be are going to beat our brains out. Monied interests, large corporations or wealthy people, will have their way with politics, while we take a step back. Then the Democrats and Republicans can merge, which is what they have done anyway."

Reading Patterson's work is akin to taking a deep whiff of pure oxygen: It clears your head. His critiques of left advocacy and the traditions of liberal social science are trenchant, sometimes injudicious, but bracingly necessary. Our current racial impasse, in which we remained mired in a swamp of mutually negating euphemisms, demands someone with Patterson's iconoclastic verve to snap us out of it. ■

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It's Class, Stupid

How the Culture Wars Sank Populism

By Chris Lehmann

Surely these are the strangest of times. The polarization of wealth and income has reached its greatest extremity in this country since the '20s, and no one—least of all those on the American left—is talking about it. Mainstream media and political discourse tirelessly adumbrate the runaway successes of the investor class and cheerily entertain the hypothesis of a recession-resistant “new economy.” Political leaders and the pundit class gingerly treat Alan Greenspan and Wall Street not merely as an informal fourth branch of government, but as gods astride the earth, manfully arranging the future while mortal onlookers in the audience gape in awe and gratitude. And the left, for the most part, demurs.

Oh, to be sure, there are stray shows of solidarity. But the clear, if rarely spoken, consensus, among many on the left is not all that different from what we hear in the mainstream: The old relations of class, shaped by older models of industrial production, are being swept away. For many on the self-identified cultural left, questions of income inequality, union organizing and control over the workplace are regarded as a sort of madwoman in the attic: shrill, hysterical, confrontational and best kept out of polite society.

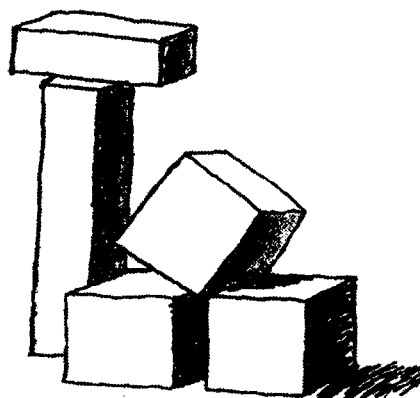
While we still have a great deal of talk about class on the left, it radiates from the central notion that class, like gender and race, is expressed and determined principally by culture. Class, in this view of things, is not a fairly rigid system by which educational opportunity, property ownership and life outcomes are distributed in the interests of those who own and manage American enterprise. This interpretation actively resists the notion that class could serve as a somewhat universal category of political resistance, binding together disparate communities and interest groups on the basis of such organizing goals as material welfare, economic justice and (dare we say it?) democracy in the workplace.

Martí A. Garza, *United for a Fair Economy*

“The left should look to models of unconventional organizing that cut across boundaries and establish links among different constituencies. The creation and strengthening of immigrant worker centers, temp worker centers, religious-community labor initiatives and other similarly organizations will help the left reach the people who are part of the diverse and growing populist tide in our nation.”

In lieu of the temptation to resume the class-vs.-culture battle (white males to the rear, all others to the vanguard, and let the infighting never end), I'd like to freeze the frame right here, and suggest that something much more instructive can be gleaned from the present culture-vs.-class

BACK to BASICS



impasse. We stand to learn much more about left politics in America if we stop asking which side should win out in the class-vs.-culture question and instead ask why we have these sorts of debates in the first place.

For our purposes, the story can be more or less jump-started with the Populist movement of the 1890s. Historians have made a revisionist cottage-industry out of competing interpretations of the original Populist movement, but rather than wade into those academic tar pits, I'd like to examine the odd migration of Populist rhetoric and iconography into the unlikely agoras of the culture wars.

With the consolidation of industrial capitalism at the end of the 19th century, the victories of the market's new masters gained a new aura of inevitability—and the struggle to assert the self-rule of ordinary citizens became much more urgent. Whereas earlier class-minded critics of the fledgling American industrial order envisioned all manner of new constitutional arrangements and formal transfers of wealth, the Populists, principally tenant farmers and small proprietors on the brink of extinction, saw a far more bleak and apocalyptic struggle taking place for the soul of the nation.

The struggle in large part concerned the nature of work in the nascent industrial order. The trusts at the center of Populist demonology were grinding the faces of the poor, in the great Marxist tradition—but they were also thwarting the access of small farmers and businessmen to the sprawling national consumer market. The class politics of Populism, therefore, was an uneasy hybrid of exploited workers, tenant farmers and the sort of characters referred to contemptuously in Marxist terminology as petit-bourgeois radicals.

Still, Populist leaders and strategists knew, given the shifting social landscape before them, that national electoral success largely depended on marshaling industrial workers into the ranks of the populist revolt. And more broadly, they asserted common cause with the urban proletarian masses. Correspondingly, the clamor of Populist labor allies—figures

such as Knights of Labor leader Terence Powderly and Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs—was to preserve the 19th-century ideal of the citizen's commonwealth on the unfamiliar new ground of an industrial mass economy.

The populist-labor alliance never took serious root, apart from a handful of outposts such as reform-happy Chicago, but that's not to say that the elements of the coalition weren't there—the 1896 Populist-Democratic fusion bore stirring, if ultimately tragic, witness to that promise. Indeed, part of the

Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont)

"If the left in this country is going to be successful, it must increase its focus on issues of concern to low-income and working people. The global economy, in terms of wages and benefits, has not improved life for the average American. The health care crisis is growing, Social Security is under massive assault and 22 percent of children live in poverty. Meanwhile, the richest one American—Bill Gates—owns more wealth than the bottom 100 million Americans. The issues are right before our eyes, and we must join with American workers in addressing them."

reason the Populist movement still inspires a welter of historical revisionism is that it was remarkably diverse. The Populist insurgency drew in its ranks not merely the embattled, shrinking agrarian majority from which it sprang, but assorted union leaders and urban reformers, small-town shopkeepers, Protestant parishioners and members of the emerging professional middle class.

Rather than fret about the myriad contradictions that such a political base might entail, Populists sought, quite sensibly, to bypass them, and proclaim their cause cognate with the beleaguered interests of "the People." They failed, of course, to storm the citadels of power. But curiously enough, populism bulks as large in our political vocabulary as it ever has, even if its meaning has been disfigured beyond all historical recognition.

Over the past generation or so, the promiscuous identification of the populist movement with what political scientists were once fond of calling "plebiscitary democracy" has ceded ground to the rampant conflation of populism with the culture wars. This odd development is itself eloquent testimony to the utter through-the-looking-glass character of latter-day American political encounters in matters of class. The rhetoric of the classes and the masses has given way to the amorphous, self-conscious quandaries of taste and attitude: One is no longer an oppressor or robber baron in the world of the culture lords—one is an "elitist," that all-purpose villain who dares to detect something suspect in mass culture or the decline of educational standards. Likewise, one is "radical" nowadays only in the land of perception and attitudes: By pursuing a politics of "representation" in the mass media, endorsing corporate and university campaigns of "diversity" hiring and sensitivity, and treating universities and the media as the principal sites of political conflict, the left has shown itself quite at home with the prevailing terms of cultural engagement.

Now, the really curious thing about the culturalization of Populism is that it owes its birthright to the late '70s move-

ment known as neoconservatism. Indeed, the neocon appropriation of class in our time, via the "New Class" hypothesis, makes up one of the most influential and interesting right-wing conspiracies going, far more momentous than anything Kenneth Starr or Richard Mellon Scaife is up to.

The fable of the New Class cabal begins, fittingly enough, with reconstructed Trotskyist, *National Interest* editor and Reagan strategist Irving Kristol. Kristol's New Class burrowed headlong into the resentments long festering among lower-middle and working-class white ethnic voters who would come to be known as Reagan Democrats. By Kristol's account, the members of the New Class were pre-eminently a cultural elite, a breed who strenuously set themselves apart from the everyday trials of working life.

They also were political elitists of the first order, disdaining the effort to put their beliefs to the test of democratic procedure, opting instead for the top-down transfusions of political authority from the courts—the most elite of American institutions. New Class members typically inhabited suburbs or rapidly gentrifying urban enclaves. They would peer down from such perches and regard lower-class folkways, such as parochial ethnic pride, rigid family discipline and religious belief, with a certain fastidious horror—or at best, with a bemused condescension.

Now, what's proved remarkable about the New Class thesis is not its analytic power—it conspicuously omits, for one, the overlords of the state and corporations, who have no need to compose themselves into scheming bureaucratic elites, since their grip on the machinery of economic and cultural hegemony is uncontested and openly celebrated. No, the New Class thesis has been successful in a much greater, and prototypically American, project: It has transposed all notions of class conflict onto the battlefield of culture. An American political tradition that raised searching questions about the character of

Robert Bray, Director of the SPIN (Strategic Progressive Information Network) Project

"The left must get back to the basics of communicating progressive values and messages through the media. Somewhere along the line we ceded the 'values' message to the right. They have 'family values,' 'small government,' 'welfare reform,' 'jobs vs. environment.' But we too have values. Economic justice: the right of every American to earn a decent living wage. Stewardship of the planet: ensuring a clean environment and a legacy for our children, including those who live in low income neighborhoods. Equality for all. Basic human compassion and dignity. Perhaps we don't trust our own ability to communicate them, or suppress our passion for believing them. Maybe we are suspect of the media. Whatever the reason, the time has come to move those messages proactively and aggressively through the press and reframe the public debate. We need to frame for our lives and spin for our rights."

work in the new industrial order had been lifted wholesale out of the American workplace. Now it could be deployed, quite harmlessly, as a makeshift template of attitudes and tastes.

As a result of this transformation, right-wing professors, journalists and think-tank apparatchiks—themselves, of course, all but card-carrying members of the New Class—can pose as champions of “the People,” simply by demonizing their opposite numbers in the liberal state, the left media and the left professoriate. Populists of the right—from P.J. O'Rourke to Fred Barnes—fancy themselves as celebrants of individual expression, and even a certain Dionysian hedonism, defending the sundry popular pleasures of cars, tobacco, predatory sex and warfare from the frumpy elites who would regulate or outlaw them. There is also the right-wing Populist “conscience constituency,” which runs the gamut from the Christian Right to Newt Gingrich, William Bennett, Paul Johnson and other guardians of the Idea of American Civilization. The point here, of course, is that these culture warriors continually lay into this or that symbolic straw demon—the record industry or the “culture of welfare”—with “the People” languishing somewhere far offstage.

And the really astonishing thing about the New Class critique has been the way that the left has taken the bait. Again, it's not hard to see why: As electoral failure has mercilessly pummeled the thinning ranks of the left faithful, culture has proven far and away the most congenial habitat for the last generation or so of leftist thinkers. Unfortunately, however, the culturalization of left discourse has played directly into the right's hand. Most obviously, it has made the left seem like the scheming bureaucrats of Kristol's overheated class delirium. But more to the point, it has also produced boundless confusion over the most basic operations of class and culture—at a time when wealth inequality has emerged as the most elephantine and unaddressed item on the left agenda. The left now devotes most of its discursive energies in the matter of class to asking itself whether the New Class critique is *really true*. There is no longer much question, it seems, of mobilizing actual working people into the ranks of the non-existent left; instead, there is endless, anxious self-examination over the staggeringly hypothetical question of who gets to speak *on behalf* of such unmobilized constituencies, and why.

We do this because doing so stands in for the actual work of politics, which increasingly terrifies us—and perhaps

Ronnie Dugger, founder of the Alliance for Democracy

“We are in a post-political era. We have to accept the fact that electoral politics won't effect fundamental change and that we have to build a people's movement with its own leadership, independent of both political parties. ... We have lost the country to the corporate oligarchy. It is over. We have to start a new fight. The key thing is for we the people to realize that we have to control the economic life of this country, as well as our political life, to end the domination of our civic life by the giant corporations and the very rich. We can't keep political democracy without inventing economic democracy. That is the work of the new movement.”

more to the point, bores us. We worry that our front-line pundits may be “out of touch” with the people because we don't have the faintest clue of who “the People” may be, or how to reach them.

Lest you think I exaggerate, I offer an illuminating and instructive case: The reflexive consensus among left and liberal commentators that James Cameron's lumbering, ahistorical epic, *Titanic*, served as some sort of populist allegory. Writing in his *New York Times* column, Frank Rich enthusiastically sounded the alarm with the breathless news that this maladroit, manipulative melodrama was the work of a “prescient artist” who descried in the well-worn tale of the big iron tub an occasion for some hearty “rich-bashing populism.”

Never mind, of course, that we are principally counseled in *Titanic* that the rich are loathsome because they're so very infernally devious and mean: We see the scions of privilege seize the babies of the poor in order to spirit their own well-fed hides aboard a lifeboat; we see them bully free-spirited Kate Winslet into corsets and constricting engagements; and, perhaps most hilariously of all, we see them firing potshots at Leonardo DiCaprio on several successive decks of a vessel that is already efficiently dispatching him to his watery doom. And just to make the whole point blindingly obvious, these melodramatic caricatures are juxtaposed to an honest-to-god earthy, fun-loving rich character, The Unsinkable Molly Brown. If only they were nicer, if they weren't so repressed and stuffy and violent, why the rich would be kind of fun!

It hardly seems like it should be necessary to insist on this point, but here goes: To confuse such oafish histrionics with Populism is roughly akin to saying that Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin merely considered the Romanovs ill-mannered.

And yet Frank Rich is only the tip of the iceberg, as it were. In her *Nation* column, Katha Pollitt does note that the film is “hokum,” but she applauds it rather aptly as *our* hokum, God bless it. It is, indeed, nothing less than “a poetic meditation on class and gender, and even, in its all-whiteness, race: The sinking of the *Titanic* represents the onrushing destruction of the old order, in which a rapacious, cruel and secretly sordid upper class suppresses proletarian and immigrant vigor and sells its own daughters into genteel bondage.”

Now, one doesn't have to be a purist connoisseur of class (or race or gender) struggle through the ages to suggest that some-



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thing is way off when a \$200-million action film designed to make teenagers cry is hailed as a populist salvo from the barricades. Nor need one belabor the point that "the old order" didn't simply up and go away because some of its more illustrious members were in a boat that sank. But would it really tax the memories of the Katha Pollitts and Frank Riches of the world to think back to director James Cameron's last nine-figure epic, *True Lies*? There they'd find an irrationally jealous government agent who goes to tremendous feats of espionage to compel his wife to perform an excruciatingly long striptease act under violent duress. And the whole turgid epic climaxes with an extended screen kiss against the backdrop of a nuclear explosion—as though neither the Cold War nor *Dr. Strangelove* had ever happened. Mightn't we be the least bit suspicious of *Titanic*'s broad strokes of feminist and class fantasy on the basis of this sort of track record?

No? Well, then, how about the actual economic conditions that produced both *True Lies* and *Titanic*? Long before he was baptized a Populist sage, you see, Cameron was known widely in the entertainment press as one of Hollywood's worst

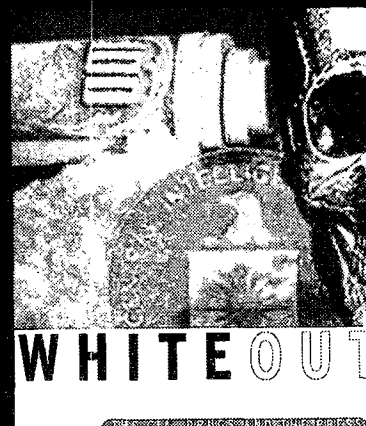
Jim Hightower, radio host

"The left can develop a broader and more relevant role in American politics by focusing less on right/left ideologies and more on top/bottom realities, and by spending less time in salons and more time in saloons."

slave drivers. On the set of *True Lies*—which like all his productions ran way over budget, prompting the "prescient artist" to work crews on marathon schedules in order to pay for all the cool explosions—Cameron threatened to fire any crew members who took a bathroom break. And the set of our latter-day Populist fable, *Titanic*, bore a much closer resemblance to the social world of *The Jungle* than to that of *Looking Backward*. One set rigger told *Time* that the 80-hour, six-day work weeks on the film were "the closest thing to slavery that I've ever laid my eyes on."

Again, the point here is not to denounce James Cameron as a hypocrite, though he most assuredly is one. But just as Cameron pompously requested a moment of silence for all the "actual people who really died" on the *Titanic*, I'd like to ask why do we on the left so rarely hear of the people who actually make our culture and economy hum? When it comes to class politics, why are we so content to settle for the endless, tediously polemic irresolution of the culture wars? Why is the left continuing to play the loser's game of cultural populism? How has it become so easy for us to project all sorts of faux-liberating messages onto the dismal shadow play of our pop culture, and never seriously entertain how that culture is made and whose interests it serves? Unless we can find a way to cast aside the childish things of the culture wars, we will settle in for a long tour through the backwaters of high-professional populism. The culture will convulse obligingly through any number of future imbroglios, the people will remain a virtual waxworks, and the battalion of culture interpreters can be counted to fight among themselves. It's what they've been trained to do, after all, and if we can be sure of nothing else, it's that their hearts will go on. ■

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Lovers in a Dangerous Time

Two Cities

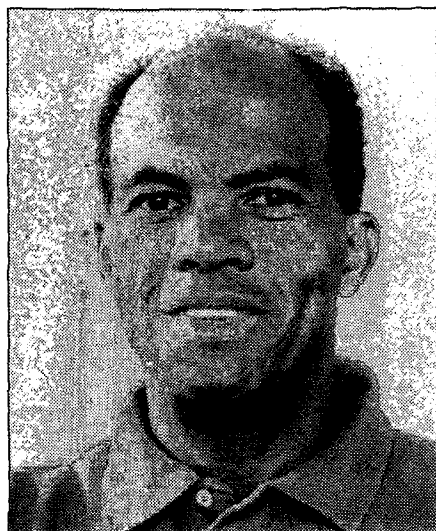
By John Edgar Wideman
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Reviewed by Scott McLemee

In an interview following the publication of his last novel, *The Cattle Killing*, John Edgar Wideman described the relationship of African-Americans to the society around them as one of unrequited love—an acute and somewhat desperate kind of pain. Love itself is always complicated enough—twisting around into hate, and back again, like a Moibus strip—without having the object of your desire express indifference, contempt, amused indulgence. And that's when the beloved—American society—is in a good mood.

The novelist's own relationship with the culture is, if anything, still more difficult. He has received the most estimable prizes given to a literary artist, including two PEN/Faulkner awards and a MacArthur ("Genius") Fellowship. Yet Wideman has never quite shaken a suspicion that tokens of recognition handed to a black intellectual may be just that, tokens. His novels and memoirs have chronicled life in black urban neighborhoods, as well as in those buried cities that constitute the prison system. His fiction is intricate in texture, reflecting an acute sense of literary form as a way of responding to (and perhaps reshaping) habits of awareness. But the modernist self-consciousness of Wideman's prose grows even sharper, given the author's severe ambivalence about how "race" imposes itself on the American mind at every turn.

His books, in short, are demanding. *Two Cities*, his latest novel, is linked by countless threads to Wideman's earlier work—especially *Philadelphia Fire*, his novel about the aftermath of the assault on the MOVE compound. (In 1986, a decade-long war of nerves between police and the hygiene-averse cult ended with the cops dropping a bomb that incinerated an entire city block, killing 11 people, five of them chil-



John Edgar Wideman

dren.) The "two cities" of the title are Pittsburgh and Philly, which across three decades of writing have become Wideman's territory, much as Joyce made Dublin his own. (Faulkner's Mississippi also comes to mind.) Yet for all the complicating echoes from his previous work, *Two Cities* may be John Edgar Wideman's most accessible novel.

It is a love story. And also, in a sense, a ghost story, since the characters always feel the close presence of the dead—the people they have lost, often to violence.

The characters may be ordinary people, but their lives are not simple. A man and a woman meet in a bar in Pittsburgh. They go home together. She is maybe half his age, and the difference is part of the attraction for both parties. Neither wants more than a one-night stand. But something clicks. As weeks pass, they grow closer, telling one another their stories. In Kassima's case they are mostly tales of loss: a husband killed by AIDS while in prison, a son dead from Russian roulette, another the victim of street violence.

One day the couple go to the park, and Robert joins a pick-up basketball game. It takes a turn for the worse. One of the players has an attitude, and a gun. The scene ends with no more than some yelling, but it's too much for Kassima. The risk of losing someone else makes

her withdraw. Robert pursues her, to no avail. She closes him out and talks only to her boarder, an old man known as Mr. Mallory, who spends his days wandering the neighborhood, taking photographs, studying a dictionary and writing letters he never sends.

One day she returns home to find that Mallory has crawled into her bed and died. Upset, she goes to Robert for help. And the flame of romance proves not quite extinguished. They make arrangements to bury the old man. The same day as Mallory's service, the funeral parlor is displaying the casket of a young man killed in gang warfare—and it eventually turns into a scene of confrontation. By the end of the novel, it is clear that, whatever future Robert and Kassima have together, the possibility of violent death will be part of it. Love may be triumphant, but it won't conquer all. It can't.

Such is the plot, reduced to a skeleton. The book's structure emerges from the streams of consciousness of the three central characters. Where one first-person monologue leaves off and another begins is not always sharply marked. The reader has work to do. Yet *Two Cities* is not a literary puzzle—one of those trick novels with false bottoms or unreliable narrators (though Mr. Mallory is a bit eccentric). After all, the blurring and rediscovery of individual identity is part of falling in love: perhaps its most dangerous aspect, but also the most pleasurable, as a couple lies in bed, exchanging the stories that account for who they are, and how they got there.

Mr. Mallory's photography—his odd method for trying to record neighborhood scenes—provides the novelist's image of his own project. He shoots image after image on the same frame, in hopes that the overlap will somehow reveal the essence of things. "I want people to see my pictures from various angles," he explains, "see the images I offer as many images, one among countless ways of seeing, so the more they look, the more there is to see. ... No single, special, secret view is sought or revealed."

The result, of course, is hard on the eyes, as Kassima discovers when she

views the pictures after Mallory's death. "Said every picture was there on the film," she tells Robert, "and one day he would or somebody would figure out a way so everything he was photographing could be printed for people to see. All I could see when I held the film up to light was gray, gray, gray. Gray close to white in some and some closer to black and some with silver veins running through or maybe some different shades of gray."

It is while sifting through Mallory's belongings—hunting without success for some indication of family to contact for the funeral—that the couple gets back together. Each of the major characters in *Two Cities* carries some sense of loss. And the very possibility of moving beyond the peculiar isolation that Mallory has lived means accepting the danger of having yet another hole torn out of their hearts. Wideman is especially good at conveying how the past haunts the present. The dead fear we may forget them, so they intrude on experience, sometimes in very demanding ways.

Among those dead are the victims of the assault on MOVE. And Mallory's picture-taking also alludes back to *Philadelphia Fire* in which the tie between photographs and loss is made explicit. There, Wideman wrote: "The lost child, the parent who grieves for the lost child owns an emptiness as tangible as a photo. You carry it around. ... This emptiness, this not having is so palpable you can pass it around a room."

In *Two Cities*, there is no easy escape from grief. But it is not the end of the story, either. "Our eyes take snapshots," writes Mallory, in a letter not sent:

Like a camera. A million, million frames day in and day out. Too quick to keep track of. Each one disappears instantly, leaving no trace behind. Except from these snapshots we build a world of things with weight, shape, things that move and last. ... Force of habit turns to certainty. We forget how spirit and mind piece the world together glimpse by glimpse. We forget our power. Forget that one naked, sideways stare, one glance away, changes everything. ■

Scott McLemee, a contributing editor to *Lingua Franca*, also writes for *Salon*, *Newsday* and *The Nation*.

King of Darkness

King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa

By Adam Hochschild
Houghton Mifflin
366 pages, \$26

Reviewed by James North

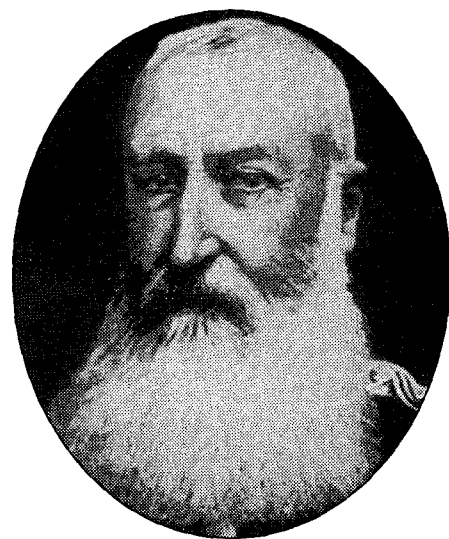
A few years ago, *The New York Times Magazine* actually ran an article that argued for the re-establishment of Western colonial control over Africa. The piece, by British journalist Paul Johnson, contended that the European colonial powers had left the continent in pretty good shape at independence in the early '60s; the Africans themselves had made a mess of things since. Western organization and expertise were needed to repair the damage.

Johnson's nasty article was based on a view of African colonial history that was so dishonest that it amounted to criminal negligence. By publishing it, the *Times* did the equivalent of giving space to a crank who denies the Holocaust in Europe. Fifty years from now, one hopes, scholars will point back to that article as one more pathetic instance of the occasional pseudo-scientific racism that marred the late-20th century.

Anyone interested in the truth about European colonialism in Africa should start with Adam Hochschild's superb new book. Part of the story of Belgian King Leopold's late-19th century private empire in central Africa has been told before. But Hochschild has used recent scholarship to create a comprehensive, formidable and brilliant account.

King Leopold's Ghost reads like a well-crafted novel. The characters are vivid, especially the Belgian king himself. A lecherous monarch with the calculating mind of a capitalist, he was also an early pioneer in public relations—he manipulated world opinion to disguise his brutal control of the vast Congo basin as a humanitarian venture. In the end, he may have made \$1.1 billion from Africa—a prodigious fortune back then.

Hochschild also deals with Victorian



conquistador Henry M. Stanley, a best-selling author who styled himself an explorer. His books, all of which included the word *dark* in the title, did much to construct the negative, primitive view of Africa that persists to this day. He also lent his fame to Leopold's exploitation schemes, in which savage white overseers enforced rubber-collecting quotas on Africans. If local people failed to gather enough rubber, colonists destroyed their villages, whipped them, shot them and cut off their hands—usually after murdering them, but sometimes before.

Though Hochschild's account is depressing, he manages to inspire as well. Leopold's brutality eventually prompted the first great worldwide human rights campaign of this century, and its characters should be better known. E.D. Morel—his friends called him the Bulldog—was an English shipping clerk who pored over manifests showing tremendous exports from central Africa, first of ivory, then of rubber. Morel realized nothing was going back into Africa to pay for these raw materials. He understood with horror that the trade imbalance could only be explained by slave labor. He resigned from his job, and spent years leading an increasingly successful international campaign to publicize the atrocities. Morel and his allies made use of then-recent technology, using gruesome photographs—included in this book—to publicize Leopold's crimes.

Morel's pressure forced the British Foreign Service to send a consular official, Roger Casement, on a fact-finding mission to the Congo. Fortunately, Casement was no time-serving drone, but a man as passionate and courageous as Morel. He evaded Leopold's local overseers, released a damning report, and later joined Morel's Congo Reform Association.

Morel and Casement are already known to history, if not well enough. But Hochschild's thorough research has uncovered other heroes, like George Washington Williams, a black American Civil War veteran and writer. He somehow made his way to the Congo in 1890, early in Leopold's criminal enterprise, and tried to sound the alarm in a pamphlet and by writing to the American president. Later, another black American, a Presbyterian missionary named William Sheppard, also raised the cry. When the colonial company, Compagnie du Kasai, sued him for libel in 1909, the Belgian Socialist leader (a lawyer named Émile Vandervelde) traveled to Africa to defend him.

Hochschild regrets that very few voices of the victims, the Africans themselves, have survived history. But memory of the European brutality does survive in local legend, such as the persistent belief in villages all along the Congo railway line, from Matadi up to Stanley Pool, that each railway tie represents one African life lost during the railroad's construction.

The lack of local sources—and the Belgian government's refusal to release the details of a 1905 Commission of Inquiry up until the '80s—partly shows why scholars have found it hard to settle on a death toll. Hochschild explains also that many Africans, probably the majority, did die of disease rather than outright murder. But he notes that people who fled to the forest to avoid the rubber quota—and, thus separated from their crops, starved—were so weakened that disease easily swept them away.

Hochschild concludes that by the time the international campaign forced Leopold to hand over his personal colony to the Belgian government in 1908, 10 million African people had died.

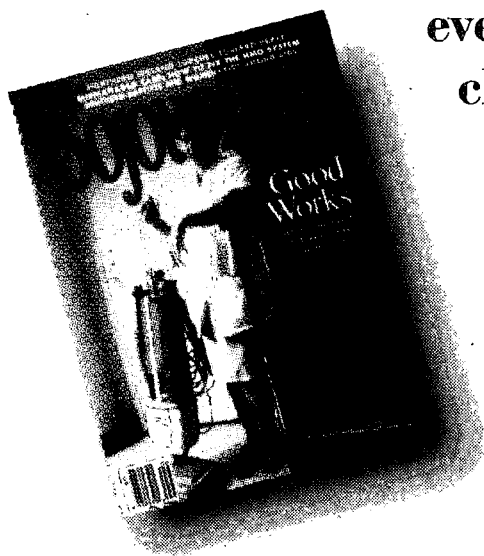
Leopold's reign in the Congo must be

the least well-known of history's mass murders. Even the excellent 1990 collection, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, failed to include it as a case study. What makes this lack of awareness even more peculiar is that a fictional treatment of Leopold's Congo, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, has been widely assigned by several generations of English teachers.

One of *King Leopold's Ghost's* most moving scenes describes indigenous Congo witnesses testifying before the 1905 Commission of Inquiry. Chief Lontulu of Bolima, one of the few Africans in this story whose names have not been lost, came forward. He "laid 110 twigs on the commission's table, each representing one of his people killed in the quest for rubber. He divided the twigs into four piles: tribal nobles, men, women, children. Twig by twig, he named the dead." ■

James North has reported from Africa, Asia and Latin America. He is completing his book *Structures of Sin*, about the global economy. He lives in New York City.

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RACE, POLITICS AND CULTURE

The Working Class, under Glass

Pecker

Directed by John Waters

Reviewed by Pat Aufderheide

John Waters, the Baltimore filmmaker who launched a national reputation with his 1972 cult film *Pink Flamingos*, set out to shock working-class homeowners who were smothering themselves with security-blanket possessions and smug preconceptions about normality and difference. He showed them the town of their nightmares—not the neat exteriors of the working class row houses, but the riotous world of society's marginalized, who put the weirdness of ordinary life on display. His timing was perfect. He appalled Baltimore's good citizens, but delighted their children. (Even his own parents have never seen the recently-reissued *Pink Flamingos*—in which transvestite Divine eats dog waste—and say they don't need to.)

Yet Waters was also part of a process by which the bland center that he had so despised in American popular culture no longer held. As mass media became more multichanneled, more diverse, vastly cruder and more vulgar, going to excess no longer looked like much of a



Lili Taylor schmoozes with Edward Furlong in John Waters' *Pecker*.

challenge. There was Howard Stern, for pity's sake. That process turned Waters' kind of outrageousness into one of many kinds of media sensationalism.

Waters always had an agenda bigger than a simple gross-out. He once told me, "All my movies are very moral. The underdogs always win. They're all about wars between two groups of people, usually involving fashion, which signifies morals." As independent filmmaking burgeoned, Waters won financing for movies that more palatably mixed his oddball social criticism with his loving fascination for grotesquerie. *Hairspray* (1988) was not just Ricki Lake's breakthrough moment, but also a glimpse of racial encounter and confrontation in '60s Baltimore. *Cry-Baby* (1990) was about class conflict in youth culture, featuring Johnny Depp as a '50s gang member. *Serial Mom* (1994) made a macabre commentary on celebrity coverage of crime.

Pecker, his latest film, continues in that tradition, but it also comes uncomfortably close to home. The plot is propelled by class-driven conflict—working-class Baltimore vs. art dealer New York. The theme, though, concerns the problem of

authentic artistic expression in a culture where everything gets packaged for sale—especially what the packagers think is unexamined "real life."

Pecker (Edward Furlong), so called by his loving family of losers because he just pecks at his food, loves to take snapshots of his down-at-heels Baltimore neighborhood when he's not flipping burgers. His camera snaps it all: the homeless folks trying on the layered look at his mother's thrift shop; his bar-owner dad's glum face on a slow day; lesbian strippers; granny's obsession with the Virgin Mary; his sister's emcee act at the local gay club; his control-freak girlfriend who runs a laundromat; his shoplifting buddy; the druggie, the teen mother, the rats copulating in the trash. Pecker looks through the lens with eyes of love.

That's not how a hot-shot New York agent (the ubiquitous Lili Taylor, whose recent work ranges from *Girls Town* to *Ransom*) sees these images, though. She spots grunge trendiness. New Yorkers gobble up Pecker's photos, treating their new-found objects of desire like so many zoo specimens or so much ethnic cuisine. It's authenticity under glass. Pecker

FINE LINE FEATURES



John Waters

returns home richer and famous, but his friends' and family's lives begin to unravel under the strain. He finds he must get his life back by turning the tables on the art elite.

Waters aficionados will delight in some familiar elements. There are the celebrity cameos—Patricia Hearst Shaw as an art world patron; transvestite and veteran Waters actor Mink Stole as a stern voting-table lady; and New York artists Cindy Sherman and Greg Gorman as themselves. There's the hallmark lumpen-Americana look, crafted by Waters' veteran crew, including production designer Vincent Peranio. There is the rendering of cartoony but not laughable characters, by superb character actors—Christina Ricci is particularly watchable as the power-mad laundromat manager.

But the movie can also make even fans uneasy. Pecker's self-referentiality doesn't stop with the fact that in real life Waters, like Pecker, does art photography. This is a movie about the marketing of the Baltimore trash class, made by the man who made polyester a fashion statement.

Is Waters, despite his sharply funny take on the world of mass representation for profit, caught in the same bind that Pecker is, as he celebrates, however lovingly, this wacky collection of freaks? This question kept bothering me as I watched a crestfallen Pecker suffer, along with his community, under the objectifying gaze of art dealers. That question must make John Waters squirm too.

• • • • •

The 25th anniversary of the 1973 coup that ruptured the democratic tradition in Chile is marked by the release in U.S.

From *Cages, Fires, Walls: Photographs from the Belfast Series* by Irish photographer Paul Seawright, currently on exhibit at Chicago's Rhona Hoffman Gallery. Seawright, born in Belfast in 1965, has taken pictures drawing attention to everyday details of Northern Ireland's troubled landscape. The wire cage in this photo is meant to prevent a variety of projectiles from getting through the pub's front door.

cities of two extraordinary documentaries by Patricio Guzmán: *The Battle of Chile* and *Chile, Obstinate Memory*. Guzmán, an activist in the Allende regime, conceived *Battle* as an epic of victory, but completed it in Cuba, three years later, as a record of debacle and national tragedy. Banned during military rule in Chile, the film traveled the world and became part of documentary history.

In the mid-'90s, with Chilean democracy restored, Guzmán finally went home, carrying a copy of the epic. *Chile, Obstinate Memory* is an hour-long memoir-film made from that journey, in which his colleagues, friends and relatives who lived that history discuss the

importance of memory. In screenings and discussion groups, young people—for whom the movie is all news—testify to the damage done by official amnesia. Guzmán chronicles his return—not as the martyr-hero so many exiles had imagined themselves—but as a forgotten man. As his professor friend says, "The failure of a dream is terrible. You can't progress without dreams." ■

The Film Forum in New York is now showing The Battle of Chile and Chile, Obstinate Memory. The two begin playing in other U.S. cities soon. Both are also available on video from First Run/Icarus Films in New York.



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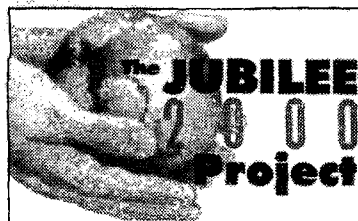
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eastern sector of the city by attempting to starve the entire city. Thirteen years later, they punished Berliners with a wall. In both cases, Americans took heroic risks for their freedom. Everyone knows this, but here you *feel* it. Who knew that pilots transporting coal for the Berlin Airlift had to fly with their hatches open to keep the coal dust from gumming their instruments? Or that kids who visited their grandparents in East Berlin in the summer of 1961 didn't get back to West Berlin the next fall?

But from good and evil emerged the dialectic. Berlin made it easier for American militarists to tell themselves they were American idealists. The same year of the Berlin Airlift, the CIA rigged its first election (in Italy, where the Communist Party's sin was finding itself the most popular partner in the left's coalition). The same year of Kennedy's ringing rhetorical defense of Berlin, our embassy didn't need the help of the CIA to oversee an assassination (in South Vietnam, where President Diem's sin was ineffectual management of our \$1 million a day in aid). Berlin made it reasonable for us to believe that if Russia or China took over anywhere else, children would be starved and no one would be able to leave again.

In truth, the Soviets in *Cold War* look less the octopus than a skittish eel: Isaacs depicts the Kremlin slithering away from delegation after delegation of supplicating satellites and would-be satellites by telling them to come back for assistance when they become more hard-line, or more soft-line, or when they're worse off, or better off.

Anyway, neither Russia nor China looks in fit shape to take over much of anything. We see a Siberian cornfield ringed with flames as weeping peasants struggle to keep alive the "miracle" strain of frost-resistant corn they have been ordered to plant. We hear of a Beijing glowing with fire as every backyard furnace smelts worthless "iron" to fulfill the Great Leap Forward.

Idealism suggested we rescue these most miserable lands from tyranny. The dialectic—since the Soviet Union, China and the United States possessed nuclear weapons—demanded we rescue South Vietnam. Not because it was an especially miserable or important place but because it was an *unimportant* place. Under the sign of Mutually Assured Destruction, our "credibility" could only be earned in lands so distant that their "loss" would not be "strategic" enough to warrant nuclear retaliation (read: Armageddon).

So the dialectic demands lies. A joke to tell at your next cocktail party: Two B-52 bombers collided in midair in 1966. Three missiles land in Spain, yielding no nuclear explosions, but the conventional devices designed to induce nuclear explosions go off, scattering enough radioactive plutonium to fill 3,500 barrels with contaminated Spanish soil. A fourth bomb is rescued, with the assistance of the entire Sixth Fleet, from the bottom of the sea. American Ambassador Biddle Duke reassures the Spanish public by cavorting in the sun-dappled waters for reporters: "If this is radioactivity," he exclaims, "I love it!"



And the dialectic, as its consummation, demands Afghanistan. (They needed *their* land war in Asia.)

A witness to the fighting in Vietnam: "You would go out, you would secure a piece of terrain during the daylight hours

... the helicopters would pick you up at night and fly you back to the security of your base camp." The next morning, it would be as if there had been no battle.

A witness to the fighting in Afghanistan: The Soviets would secure a piece of terrain during the daylight hours. "The next morning we'd have the same situation, as if there had been no battle."

We see the infamous 1965 report from Vietnam on the "Zippo raid": 150 huts burned to the ground because, from one of them, someone had heard gunfire.

We hear testimony from a Soviet soldier in Afghanistan: They rounded up the occupants of one village, poured kerosene over them and set them aflame. "There was no such thing as a peaceful population," he explains. "Yes, it was cruel. Yes, we did it. But those kids were torturing our wounded soldiers with knives."

We learn that Andropov was ready for a withdrawal negotiated through the United Nations, then hear the CIA dismissing the possibility as inconceivable. After all, we had only considered negotiated withdrawal in Vietnam after an extended indiscriminate bombing campaign. So we stepped up our support for the fundamentalist Mujahedeen, who we see Carter administration National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski addressing in a windswept valley. He points to the mountains—"That land over there is yours. You'll go back to it one day"—and he points skyward—"because your cause is right, and God is on your side." Next we see battlefield footage of a soldier from one bickering faction of God's chosen people berating a soldier from another. The subtitle appears thus: "Move your fat ass and shoot the f***ing rocket!" Soon, the Soviets inaugurate an indiscriminate bombing campaign.

Years later, one or another of those factions may or may not have joined forces with Osama bin Laden in a more discriminating bombing campaign, this one against American embassies in Africa. Years later, reconstituted as the Taliban, one or more of those factions would wreak savage Islamic Holy War in Afghanistan, with considerable more command of the Stinger missiles they had beta-tested for us a decade earlier.

And when the Cold War was over, American militarists like Frank Anderson, head of the CIA's Afghanistan Task Force—casting his gaze in the direction of the one million Afghan dead and the five million Afghan wounded or forced to flee their homes since 1979, but somehow seeing only the children no longer trapped across the wall in East Berlin—would style themselves idealists.

"I haven't had a bad night. It's not because I'm not without feeling, or without understanding of how much agony goes along with war. It's just that this was such a contribution to the end of what was otherwise an evil that inflicted other kinds of pain on so many other people that, on balance, it was worth it."

I sympathize with your position, Frank, I really do. But I can't agree. This is not a better world you have made by "winning" the Cold War. It is only a different one. ☐

Rick Perlstein, a contributing editor to *Lingua Franca*, is writing a book about the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign.



Ted Does the Cold War

BY RICK PERLSTEIN

This is how it all must have come about. First, in 1994, media baron Ted Turner, looking to fill a programming hole on his flagship network, CNN, green-lighted the epic 25-part documentary *Cold War*.

Then came the extraordinary ingathering of the anonymous dozens before director Sir Jeremy Isaacs' cameras: the "candy bomber" of the Berlin Airlift of 1946; the wizened Greek dirt-farmer who gratefully received a mule from the Marshall Plan in 1947; the matron whose Communist fiancé was excommunicated by the Catholic Church before the U.S.-rigged Italian general elections of 1948—and on and on, all the way up to the astonished CIA clerk who looked up from the water-cooler in 1991 to learn that her mild-mannered officemate Aldrich Ames was the most audacious spy since Mata Hari.

Then came the interviews with every president and premier and master spy and four-star general still standing—and even, after marathon negotiations, a marathon interview with Fidel Castro.

Then came the burrowings in yard after yard of just-now-opened and just-yesterday-declassified footage to find the flame-licked ghosts fleeing from an engine fire in a Soviet ICBM plant; the priceless shots from the Stasi's all-seeing toiletcam; Times Square, deserted, two minutes after the air-horn blows for an apocalyptic fire drill.

Then came the bills. Lots of bills. So before paying, Ted Turner took the time to do what I have just done now: Sit down and watch, back to back, the 25 episodes of the show

that will own the next seven months of Sundays on CNN. And then he tore off one more check: A billion dollars for the United Nations. Muttering, dazedly: "There has to be a better way to run a world."

Watch *Cold War*. Get past the utter conventionality of its format—talking heads, newsreels, stock footage of a bustling Wall Street trading floor to let you know it's the '20s followed by the soup line that lets you know it's the '30s—because it is nuanced, deep and opinionated, and because its pre-eminent conclusion, unimpregnable, is also mine: one should feel nostalgia for the Cold War as one feels nostalgia for a grease fire.

Cold War's opening shot (typical of the dogged industry of these documentarians, I don't think it has been seen before) is of an underground amphitheater, deep beneath a palatial Washington hostelry, where members of Congress were to assemble in the event of nuclear war. The camera pans over the bunk beds they were to sleep in, then over an entire magazine of small arms set aside to keep order should the august legislators' nerves snap. Consider it an allegory of the inexorable logic to be ground out in the 25 episodes to follow: Security becomes by turns a higher law than the lawmakers.

There is good and evil in this *Cold War*, not just inexorable logic: It is fitting and proper that we should see that what we did in Berlin was good and what the Soviet Union did in Berlin was evil. The USSR punished the population of the

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